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Bihar Political Pot Cools Down

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA PATNA/NEW DELHI

 $E_{speculation,\ JD(U)}^{nding\ a\ week-long\ period\ of}$ Nitish Kumar did another political somersault on Sunday, this time securing the backing of the BJP and re-appointing himself as Chief Minister by taking the oath for a record ninth time to lead the Bihar Government.

Eighteen months ago, Nitish had parted ways with the BJP, despite winning the 2020 Assembly elections as part of the NDA coalition. He joined the RJD-Congress

coalition in August 2022, leading the Government with RJD's Tejashwi Yadav as his deputy. Nitish's coronation,

Tejashwi said it marked the end of Nitish style of politics and the demise of JD(U) in Bihar. Governor Rajendra Arlekar

administered the oath of office and secrecy at the Raj Bhavan in Patna, with BJP president JP Nadda in attendance, after a wellorchestrated change of regime over 72 hours in the crucial State that holds 40 Lok Sabha seats. Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that the newly sworn-in

NDA Government in Bihar, led by Nitish, will spare no effort for the State's development. Alongside Nitish, BJP leaders Vijay Kumar Sinha, State BJP chief Samrat Choudhary took oath as Deputy CMs, and BJP's Prem Kumar took oath as a Minister.

JD(U) members Vijay Kumar

Nitish Kumar sworn in as Bihar CM



JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar takes oath as Bihar CM during the swearing-in ceremony of new State Government, at Raj Bhavan in Patna PTI

Choudhary, Vijendra Yadav, and Shrawan Kumar also took oath, along with former CM Ram Manjhi-led Hindustan Awam Morcha's Santosh Kumar Suman and Independent legislator Sumit Singh.

Other members of the council of Ministers will be decided in a day or two, sources said.

Referring to his party's alliance with the NDA, Nitish said, "We will stay together. Eight leaders took oath as Ministers today, and the rest will be inducted soon." Responding to Tejashwi's statement, "JDU will be finished in 2024," Nitish said, "We work for the development and progress of Bihar. We will keep doing the same, nothing else. Tejashwi was not doing anything. Now I am back where I was before (in the NDA), and now there is no question of going anywhere."

Continued on Page 2



Samrat, Vijay appointed **Deputy Chief Ministers**

Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary (54) and Vijay Kumar Sinha (64) on Sunday emerged as dark horse in the second generation leadership of BJP in

Choudhary, who belongs to backward caste, is likely to get Home portfolio in the new Nitish Kumar Cabinet while Sinha is from upper caste. Other party leaders who are likely to be made Ministers in the new Government are Nitin Nabin, Shahnawaz Hussain, Rampreet Paswan, Neeraj Singh Babloo. BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi, who was deputy to Nitish Kumar when the BJP and the ID(U) was in an alliance in the

State, is wanted back in the State. Sources said Bihar has as many as 40 Lok Sabha seats, making it very significant politically. The bigger picture appears to be the factor that led the BJP to welcome Nitish, infamous for his flip-flops, back

into the NDA fold. As the country gears up for the Lok Sabha polls next year, the BJP now appears a formidable force armed with the charisma of Prime Minister Modi and meticulous election machinery. Addressing a Press conference in Patna, shortly after he attended Kumar's swearing in with his party as an alliance partner, BJP national president JP Nadda asserted that NDA will "sweep" the

upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Continued on Page 2

With the current jolt by the JD(U) which till a day earlier was the harbinger of larger Opposition coalition INDIA Bloc landed in a trouble on Sunday with its chief architect Nitish Kumar shook hands with the NDA after his aspirations to take on BJP's tallest leader Prime

Minister Narendra Modi did not materialise even after nine months of his engagement with the Congress led stakeholders of Opposition Bloc.

Days after the Trinamool Congress-led West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee poured cold waters on the grouping by announcing to go solo in Lok Sabha polls and there shall be no truck with the

Congress, the JD(U) too said the alliance was collapsing due to the grand old party's indifferent attitude to regional allies. The Aam Aadmi Party too last

week announced to contest alone in Punjab. Which means after West Bengal, Bihar, Punjab gone only hope remains in Jharkhand even as the tantrums of both the

Akhilesh Yadav-led Samajwadi

for 80 Lok Sabha seats. Akhilesh, however,

Party and the Congress is visible

in Uttar Pradesh which accounts

announced to share 11 seats with the Congress, against the latter's demand of 20. As Nitish tendered his resignation on Sunday morning, he explained that things in the INDIA Bloc have not been working out.

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No respite from winter chill One dead after stage collapses



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

day after bright sunshine, And Delhiites once again woke up to a foggy morning and extreme cold on Sunday, causing delays in flights, trains, and other modes of transportation.

The minimum temperature was recorded at 6 degrees Celsius, two notches below the season's average, while the maximum temperature settled at 18.6 degrees Celsius, normal for the season's average. Mayur Vihar was the coldest area in Delhi, recording the maximum temperature at 14.6 degrees Celsius, the lowest in the city. The India Meteorological

Department (IMD) has forecast dense fog for the next five days, coupled with cold conditions for the next two days in North India. According to the IMD, from January 31 to February 1, there will be a generally cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle. From January 28 to 30, the city may witness moderate fog conditions. The Air Quality Index (AQI) was recorded at 324 at 9 am, settling at 384 in the "very poor" category at 6 pm, according to the Central Pollution Control Board

The IMD weather forecast predicts that the Western pockets of dense fog."
Himalayan Region will be Continued or

impacted by a new Western Disturbance starting on January 28. From January 31, the Western Himalayan region and the adjacent plains of Northwest India are expected to be affected by another disturbance in the west.

"Light/moderate isolated to rainfall/snowf very likely over Uttarakhand and light rainfall over Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, west Uttar Pradesh from January 31 to February 2," the Met office said in a statement.

Over the next two days, these weather systems are predicted to bring light, isolated rainfall or snowfall to parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzaffarabad, and Himachal Pradesh. From January 29 to February 1, there will be moderate, scattered to fairly widespread

rainfall or snowfall.
The IMD also issues a warning, saying on January 28, dense to extremely dense fog conditions are likely to be present over a large portion of East Uttar Pradesh as well as over certain areas of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, West Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar for a few hours during the night and morning. Over the next three days, the area is expected to see isolated

STAFF REPORTER ■ **NEW DELHI** man died and 17 devo-

Atees were injured when a stage set up for a religious function, attended by singer B Praak, at the Kalkaji temple here, collapsed on Sunday around 12:30 am.

The deceased has been identified as Tina, a resident of Tughlakabad extension.

According to police, a 'jagran' (religious function) was organised at the Mahant Parishar of Kalkaji temple on Saturday, and around 1,600

people attended it.
The temple management had hired event planners to organise the jagran. No arrests have been made so far, police sources said.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal condoled the death of the woman and wished for the speedy recovery of the injured. "The accident that happened last night during a 'jagran' at the Kalkaji temple is tragic. A woman has died; may her soul rest in peace. I wish for the speedy recovery s of dense fog." of the 17 injured people, 'Kejriwal said in a post on 'X'



A collapsed platform at Kalkaji Mandir, in New Delhi, on Sunday. At least one person was killed and 17 others suffered injuries after the platform collapsed during a jagran programme, according to officials

people of Delhi to take special care of safety standards in any kind of big and make arrangements in such a way

happens," he added. Deputy Commissioner of According to the police, an Police (southeast) Rajesh elevated wooden platform

in Hindi."I appeal to the had been granted for the event at the temple. "However, sufficient staff was deployed to maintain law and order. There was a gathering of around 1,500 to 1,600 people at around 12:30 am on that no untoward incident Sunday," he said."

Deo said no prior permission supported by an iron frame

was set up near the main stage for the families of the organisers and VIPs. Around 12:30 am, the elevated platform broke right from the middle as it could not bear the weight of the people sitting on it and collapsed, injuring those seated on it and close to it on the ground, the DCP said.

there was a large gathering at the temple as singer B Praak the stage collapsed, and those who were sitting close to the stage received injuries. The singer had left by that time," he said. Another person who was present at the temple said he heard a loud noise and saw people running out. "It was a stampede-like situation. Everyone was running for their lives. I was outside the temple when I got to know that the stage collapsed and some people received injuries," he said. Among those who had gone to attend the function but returned home early because of the huge rush at the temple, 20-year-old Suman Kanojia of Chirag Delhi said, "I went there with a relative at around 10 pm and returned by 11 pm because it was so crowded. We thought of staying there a little longer but thankfully we didn't.""There was a huge crowd. There were temple volunteers around to manage the crowd but no policemen," Kanojia said.

Continued on Page 2

Ram rule inspired Constitution makers:

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday that the rule of Lord Ram was a source of inspiration for the Constitution makers, noting that pictures of him, Sita, and Lakshman adorned the pages of the Constitution.

In the first Mann Ki Baat broadcast of this year, Modi said the consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya brought people across the country together, the collective of the country making strength visible.

"And that is why, on January 22 in Ayodhya, I talked about 'Dev to Desh' and 'Ram to Rashtra," he said.

"Everyone's feeling is the same, everyone's devotion is the same. Ram is in everyone's words, Ram is in everyone's heart," Modi said. During this period, many people sang Ram bhajans and dedicated them to Lord Ram. On January 22 evening, the whole country lit 'Ram Jyoti' and celebrated Diwali, he noted. "During this time, the collective strength of the country was visible, forming the basis of our pledge for a developed India," the Prime Minister said.

The collective power will take the country to new heights of progress, he said. In his broadcast, he urged young voters to register themselves so that they could exercise their franchise and



participation of people in voting at a time when many countries in the world are seeing a downward trend.

Nearly 45 per cent of votes were cast in the first national elections in 1951-52, and the percentage has been going up while the number of electorates has surged to 96 crore, over three times the US population, he said.

In the monthly broadcast, Modi noted that the absence of a common language for the terminology of diseases, treatments, and medicines in alternative medicines like Ayurveda, Siddha, or Unani was a longstanding problem, and said a solution has been

now found. going on, what things one is He said, "I am happy to share allergic to," he said.

that the Ministry of AYUSH has categorised the data and terminology related to terminology related to Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani medicine, with the help of World Organization Through the efforts of both, the terminology related to disease and treatment in Ayurveda, Unani, and Siddha medicine has been codified."

He said an advantage of this

would be that if patients go

to another doctor with their slip, the doctor will get complete information. "That slip will help one in knowing one's treatment, what medicines one has been taking, for how long the treatment has been

In a reference to the recent Padma awards, Modi said many of those bestowed the honuor were those who worked at grassroots and away from the limelight to make big changes in society. "I am very happy that the system of Padma awards has transformed completely in the last decade. Now it has become people's Padma," he said.

The contribution of each one of the Padma awardees is an inspiration for countrymen, he said and added that many of them were those who brought glory to the country in the world of classical dance, classical music, folk dance, theatre, and bhaians.

Continued on Page 2

TMC continues to attack WB Congress

A phone call from Sonia Gandhi enquiring after her health following a minor road accident, a favourable chat from Priyanka Vadra and numerous cosseting statements from senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh literally begging her to join Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra – which was presently in North Bengal — "even for 5-10 minutes" no news emanated from the Trinamool Congress interiors that Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee would respond favourably to Janpath's frantic appeal post Nitish Kumar somersault in Bihar.

Banerjee who on Sunday embarked on a 5-day tour of North Bengal and whose presence in the region would coincide with Gandhi's Yatra was unlikely to join the march TMC sources said though not ruling out a short informal meeting between the two during their stay in the region.

While Banerjee has a packed programme with successive meetings in Coochbehar, Siliguri, Raiganj, Malda and Murshidabad Gandhi was to briefly slip into Bihar's Katihar district from Islampur in Bengal before reappearing in Malda and then Murshidabad on January 31, Congress



Meanwhile, Ramesh continued to sweet-talk Banerjee say-Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance would be a nullity without the Chief Minister. "As has already been told by our top leadership that Mamata Banerjee is extremely dear to us... she is close to our heart and without her INDIA alliance cannot be thought of ... we respect Mamata ji and continue to learn and take inspiration from her "We also know that she is a busy Chief Minister for whom it is very difficult to find time for the Yatra but still we will cordially request her to take even 5-10 minutes time out of her busy schedule to join the Yatra ... we will be obliged if she manages to do so," Ramesh said.

Notwithstanding, Ramesh's conciliatory remarks TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh

continued to attack Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury wondering why the Janpath would not rein him in when Chowdhury was attacking the TMC in "filthiest

He said, "Adhir Chowdhury who is also the leader of the Congress in Parliament has been attacking our leader in filthiest of words ... but their national leadership kept mum . there was a need to rein him

in ... and now there is no end to sugar-coated statements ... this is the same Congress which joined hands with the CPI(M) and fought elections in 2016 and 2021 before being reduced to Zero," reminding that, "though Rahul Gandhi has come to Bengal with his own political programme it has to be remembered that only the TMC can defeat the BJP which

Rahul appeals West Bengal to show India ideological path again

ongress leader Rahul ongress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday appealed to the people of Bengal to once again show the ideological path to the nation as they did during the freedom struggle to get rid of the present atmosphere of hatred. Gandhi who resumed his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from in North Bengal led two massive rallies from Jalpaiguri and Siliguri where he appealed to the people of Bengal to show the way as they had shown during the freedom

Gandhi --- who would not spend a word on Mamata Banerjee --- though said that he would "never forget the love I have received from the people of Bengal," reminding once again that "I have come to open a shop of love in the market of hatred," and appealing to the people of the State to "once again show the right path to the nation."

He said "Bengal is a special case for us because during the fight against the British Bengal had shown the nation the ideological path to freedom ... it is a land where the icons like Rabindranath Tagore, Subhash Chandra Bose, Swami Vivekananda had lived ... a time has come once again



when the people of this State should come forward to show way to the rest of the country .. it is your responsibility to once again use your intellect because the Bengalis are intellectuals ... if you do not do your duty today then the country will not forgive you." Gandhi who led two massive rallies often its ranks swelled by the Left workers would not speak a word against Banerjee or her party men regardless of the fact that alleged Trinamool workers tore down his posters

and stopped Congress workers

from joining the rallies. Rather

he asked the people to make

his yatra a grand a success.

"I have come to you with an expectation because you aloe can do what others cannot, Gandhi said adding, in days to come Bengal would once again "establish its place in the world as a messenger of peace and show the nation the way to peace and harmony by discarding the environment of

ACP son killed over money dispute, body recovered from Haryana canal

tion case at Samaipur Badli

Abhishek was nabbed on

Friday and on interrogation, it

was revealed that on the noon

of January 22 (Monday), Vikas,

the lawyer's clerk, contacted

him and asked him to come

with him to attend a marriage

function in Bhiwani," Deputy

Commissioner of Police (outer

north) Ravi Kumar Singh said.

Vikas had told Abhishek that

Lakshya, who also practices in

the Tis Hazari Court, had

taken a loan from him and

when he asked Lakshya to

return his money then he mis-

The duo hatched a plan to eliminate Lakshya, deciding to throw him into the Munak

"They started on Monday after-

noon from Mukarba Chowk where Lakshya met Abhishek

in a car. Abhishek sat inside the

car with Lakshya and later Vikas also joined them," the

behaved with him.

canal in Haryana.

police station.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police has recovered the body of the son of an assistant commissioner of police who was allegedly pushed into a canal in Haryana by two of his friends over a financial dispute, officials on Sunday said.

The main accused Vikas Bharadwaj has also been arrested, they said. The body of the ACP's son was

allegedly thrown into the canal by two men, including a clerk working with a lawyer in the Tis Hazari Court, while returning from a wedding, police said. 26-year-old Lakshya Chauhan had gone to attend a marriage function in Haryana's Sonepat on Monday along with two of his friends -- Vikas Bharadwaj and Abhishek, police had said on Thursday.

After he did not return home the next day, his father Yashpal Singh, posted as ACP (Operations) in Outer-north Delhi, lodged a missing complaint on Tuesday, they said. The complaint was later converted into an abduction FIR when the police suspected some foul play during investi-gation, an official said.

The entire incident was unearthed on Friday after 19year-old Abhishek, a resident of Narela, was arrested and questioned, prompting the police to add Section 302 (murder) of the IPC in the FIR which was earlier registered as an abducThe crime took place during the return journey.

"By late night, they reached the marriage function in Bhiwani and left after 12 am," the DCP

Stopping at Panipat, the trio got out of the car to relieve them-

"Seizing the opportunity, Abhishek and Vikas allegedly pushed Lakshya into the canal and fled the scene in his car. Vikas later dropped Abhishek off in Narela before making his escape," the DCP said. The police had subsequently

added sections 302 (murder)

and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence) of the IPC in the FIR, based on the evidence gathered, said the officer. The DCP said the main accused Vikas was arrested on

Sunday and the car used in the crime was also recovered. 'The body of the deceased

was recovered from the canal near Samalkha in Haryana," he

Achieved breakthrough by building Naushera Tunnel: BRO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) ■ Sunday announced that it has achieved a breakthrough in 'Golden Arc Road' by building the 700-meter-long Naushera tunnel on the Akhnoor-Poonch National Highway (NH-Lt Gen Raghu Srinivasan, DG of Border Roads

Organisation attended the breakthrough ceremony along with senior project engineers. The breakthrough moment was celebrated by the entire team by raising patriotic slogans and hailing the team spirit of the engineers and laborers working on the project.
Highlighting the importance of the road

infrastructure project Lt-Gen Raghu Srinivasan said this project is a major step forward in enhancing regional connectivity and facilitating smoother transportation along the National Highway.

The Golden Arc Road is an old and highly strategic 200 Km stretch that connects the south Kashmir-Jammu region to the west of Jammu. It connects the important border areas four major tunnels in this stretch viz Kandi tunnel, Sungal tunnel, Naushera tunnel, and BhimberGali tunnel.

Last year on 25 Nov 2023 breakthrough of the Kandi tunnel was achieved signifying the efforts of BRO towards providing connectivity across the areas of Rajouri and Poonch. The progress of the National Highway has taken place and the project is expected to be com-



pleted by 2026 before its specified time În his brief address, Lt Gen Raghu Srinivasan, DG BR mentioned that BRO is spearheading crucial road projects to connect remote areas with major centers in the Jammu-Poonch

Lt-Gen Srinivasan said, the Jammu-Poonch link, advancing rapidly, is on track for completion in the next few years. On being asked about Defence Infrastructure along LoC, defence infrastructure is a continuous process and Border Roads Organisation is committed to strengthening defence infrastructure by building and upgrading strategic roads all along the IB, LoC, and LAC. BRO and Project Sampark are steadfast in their commitment to Create, Connect, Care, and save the lives of the citizens of its area of respon-

Delhi BJP announces list of elections in charge for 70 Vidhan Sabha seats

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Aiming to strengthen the party both organisationally and politically ahead of 2024 Lok Sabha elections and 2025 Vidhan Sabha elections the Delhi BJP on Sunday announced a list of elections in charge of 70 Vidhan Sabha seats. The list was issued by Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Sunday.
"We have announced this list

of Vidhan Sabha incharges of Vidnan Sabna incharges almost a year ahead of Vidhan Sabha election in February 2025 and this will help us strengthen the party both organisationally as well as politically for both ensuing Lok Sabha & assembly elections," he

Rajendra Sharda has been Badarpur assembly, Satendra Choudhary has been appointed of Tugalakabad assembly. Rakesh Gulia has been appointed of Devli assembly seat. Ajay Bhardwaj has been appointed as election in charge of Adarsh Nagar seat, Kailash Yadav, has been appointed of



Shalimar Bagh seat. Santosh Pal, has been appointed of Gokalpuri seat. Satyadeo Chaudhary has been appointed of Jangpura; BB Tyagi, of Trilok Puri; Ajay Khanna, of Viswas Nagar and Suman Dagar, of Palam.

Making a scathing attack on AAP Convener and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal, Sachdeva said that Kejriwal seems to have become the Maha Thug in the Thug Gathbandhan (alliance)

The Delhi BJP President has said that due to self centered politics of Congress the Indi alliance of Opposition parties has already started splitting apart but ultimately it is Arvind Kejriwal who seems to be becoming the Maha Thug of the Opposition Gathbandhan. | days.

No respite...

At the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport, several flights were delayed due to foggy conditions on Sunday. Similarly, trains experienced delays at the New Delhi, Old Delhi, and Nizamuddin railway stations owing to the thick blanket of fog enveloping the NCR region. The maximum temperature

was recorded in Palam at 18.8 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road at 17 degrees Celsius, Ridge at 16.9 degrees Celsius, Ayanagar at 19.2 degrees Celsius, Jafarpur at 19.2 degrees Celsius, Mungeshpur at 18 degrees Celsius, Narela at 15.9 degrees Celsius, Pusa at 18.1 degrees Celsius, and Pitampura at 18.8 degrees Celsius. On Saturday, the minimum temperature recorded was 4.3 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal.

cold wave days so far, Delhi has experienced its coldest January in 13 years. While the cold was almost crippling in its intensity, temperature projections for the city îndicate an incremental improvement in the coming

One dead after stage collapses during jagran... From Page 1 has been launched, the DCP

Pushpa Šingh, 38, of Shahpur Jat too counted her lucky stars. "I went there with another person around 9 pm, and it was overcrowded. Even the parking was full of people. We left around 10:30 pm. I am just thanking my luck that we left before it happened." All those injured in the stage

collapse were rushed to the AIIMS Trauma Centre and the Safdarjung and MAX hospitals by police and the public."

to the spot, and seventeen people were reported injured. A 45-year-old woman, Tina. was brought dead to MAX hospital," Deo said, adding that a Delhi Police crime team visited the spot later. "Tina's husband works as a

has been sent for postmortem," the officer said. The condition of all those injured is stated to be stable, he added. An FIR under sections 337, 304A, and 188

of the IPC was registered

against the organisers, and

further probe into the matter

vegetable seller, and they is extremely unfortunate... At Ma Kalkaji Mandir. I hope those who suffered injuries get well soon and are all fine,"

Director of Delhi Fire Services Atul Garg said his department was informed about the incident at 12:45 am. Teams, along with three fire tenders, were rushed to the site. The kirtan stage had collapsed, injuring some people who were rushed to

hospitals, he said.

Stressing the need for sound management, singer B Praak expressed disappointment after a stage set up for a religious function at the Kalkaji temple collapsed in the early hours of Sunday. Praak, who performed at the event, shared a video message on his Instagram Story soon after the incident. "I am very sad and disappointed. This is the first time I saw something like this happen at a place where I deeply saddened by it. What happened at Kalkaji Mandir

said the 37-year-old, known

for songs like "Teri Mitti"

Bihar Political Pot Cools...

Earlier in the day, Nitish resigned as the Chief Minister, citing issues in the 'Mahagathbandhan' and the Opposition Bloc INDIA. He then staked claim to form a new Government with the Kumar's former

'Mahagathbandhan' ally RJD boycotted the event, while another former ally Congress remained absent. Nitish first took oath as the State's Chief Minister in 2000,

but his Government fell within a week. In May 2014, he stepped down but returned eight months later, elbowing out his then protégé Jitan Ram Manjhi, as CM in November 2015 when the JD(U), RJD, and Congress won the Assembly elections. In 2017, he resigned, only to

form a new Government with the BJP. He returned as the CM after the 2020 Assembly polls, which the NDA won, but the JD(U) performed poorly, with the blame placed on Chirag Paswan-led Lok Jan Shakti, who is now a natural member of the NDA coalition

The Bihar Assembly has a strength of 243 members, with the RJD as the largest single party (79 MLAs), followed by the BJP at 78, JD(U) at 45, the Congress 19, the HAM 4, and the rest in single digits.

Talking to the media after the oath ceremony, Nadda said. "It is on record that whenever NDA forms the Government Bihar, stability and

development take a quantum leap. Under the leadership of Modi, NDA will sweep the Lok Sabha election and will again form the Government in Bihar in the next Assembly."

With this latest change of guard, Nitish is seen as a weak political leader in Bihar, given the double number of BJP MLAs compared to the JD(U). Nitish has returned to the BJP fold, claiming that he felt restless in the Opposition alliance INDIA, which he anticipating that the bloc would name him the Prime Ministerial candidate.

This did not materialise, leading him to overhaul his party by appointing himself as JD(Ú) chief and accusing his close confidant Lallan Singh of playing to the tunes of Congress and RJD's supremo Lalu Prasad.

An old video of Nitish's remarks on the BJP resurfaced on Sunday when he had uttered, 'Mar jana qubool hai, unke (BJP) saath jana humko kabhi qubool nahi hai, ye acchi tarah samajh lijiye.' (Dying is acceptable, going with them is never acceptable to us, understand this)."

Samrat, Vijay appointed...

From Page 1 He said the new NDA Government headed by Nitish will make 'Ujjwal Bihar."The people of Bihar had given the mandate in the last Assembly polls to our natural alliance with Nitish. Bihar has gained whenever we have been in power together, be it in terms of law and order or economic development," he said.

He asserted that "Bihar will again see growth propelled by double engine, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the helm at the Centre". With the latest development,

the present generation leaders of BJP in Bihar are likely to be sidelined in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. On Sunday, Choudhary was elected the leader of the BJP legislature party on Sunday and Sinha as his deputy. Choudhary, a Kushwaha

OBC leader, was appointed as Bihar's State president last year replacing Sanjay Jaiswal Choudhary, a crucial State for the BJP, reportedly due to the closeness to Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He was appointed as Bihar BJP chief as the BJP had hoped to engineer a split in Nitish's core "Luv-Kush" (OBC Kurmi-Koeri) vote base. He was given the task to deliver the 2025 Assembly polls for the party. Known to be a vocal critic of Nitish, Choudhary had started

wearing a turban after the

ID(U) supremo dumped the BJP last year, vowing to take it off only after his party returns to power. He often criticised the JD(U) supremo on "administrative lapses", even when the BJP was part of the ruling alliance.

Before joining the BJP in 2018, Chaudhary was a member of Rashtriya Janata Dal and Janata Dal (United). He left the RJD in 2014 and joined the JD(U). Shakuni father,

Choudhary was an army

man-turned-politician who started off in the Congress, and frequently switched allegiance between archrivals Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar. Samrat was a Minister in the Government headed by Rabri Devi, the RJD supremo's wife, and remained with the party for quite a while after it was ousted from power in 2005. In 2014, he became part of a rebel faction and joined the JD(U) Government headed

by Jitan Ram Manjhi, who

had taken over after Kumar

had stepped down. Three years later, he grew disenchanted with the JD(U) and joined the BJP, which recognised his potential, both as a fiery speaker and as a leader belonging to the prominent Koeri caste. Choudhary was made a vicepresident of the State unit and was later rewarded with a berth in the legislative council. He became a

in

Minister

Government after the NDA won the 2020 Assembly

polls. He has also served as Panchayati Raj Minister in the expanded Cabinet of the Nitish Government from BJP quota in 2021. He has also served as Minister for Urban Development and Housing, Health in 2014 in Jitan Ram Manjhi Ministry and Minister of Metrology and Horticulture in 1999 in Rabri Devi Ministry.

Chaudhary entered active politics in 1990, and on May 19, 1999, he was sworn in as the Minister of Agriculture in the Bihar Government. He contested from Parbatta (Vidhan Sabha constituency) in 2000 and 2010 and was elected MLA.

other hand, an experienced upper-caste BJP leader, Sinha has held posts as varied as the Bihar Assembly Speaker, a Cabinet Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Sinha, who belongs to the

Bhumihar influential community, was an active member of the Akhil Vidyarthi Bharativa Parishad, the RSS' student wing, while pursuing a diploma course in civil engineering at a polytechnic in Barauni. Sinha made his debut in the

Assembly in 2010 and got a ministerial berth seven years later, when he was given the crucial labour resources department.

Ram rule inspired **Constitution makers...**

Many people from abroad have also been honoured with the Padma awards, as their work is rendering new heights to Indian culture and heritage, he said. Lauding the presence of women power in the Republic Day parade, the Prime Minister said

out of the 20 contingents, 11 were all-women. We saw that even in the tableaux that went by, all the artists were women. About one and a half thousand daughters took part in the cultural programmes that took place," he said. India of the 21st century is moving ahead with the mantra of women-led development, he said. This time 13 women athletes were honored with the Arjuna Award, he noted.

Lauding organ donors, he said some people perform their duties through social service, some by joining the Army, some by teaching the next generation, but there are some who even after the end of life fulfill their responsibilities towards society.

Talking about National Voters' Day celebrated on January 25, Modi shared that there are 96 crore eligible voters in India. He praised the efforts of the Election Commission of India in helping ensure that citizens exercise their right to vote. Modi urged first-time voters to get their names added to the voters list. In the previous edition of Mann Ki Baat, Modi talked about matters related to science, mental health, artificial intelligence (AI), and fitness. The programme was aired on December 31, 2023.

Final nail in...

From Page 1

While playing the lead role in the coalition, the Congress said it was aware of what was brewing in Bihar but did not comment on it before in the interest of the INDIA Bloc.

Countering JD(U)'s allegation that the Congress insulted Nitish time and again, the grand old party said if Nitish wanted to stay, he would have; but he wanted to join the NDA. The Congress said party chief Mallikarjun Kharge tried to reach out to Nitish but was

unsuccessful. Kharge said Nitish's switch was pre-planned and Nitish kept the Congress, and the RJD

leadership in the dark. The party, which is now left in

the lurch with sole coffers in Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena and Sharad Pawar led-NCP besides the DMK, alleged that the BJP is doing its best to cause a "mini implosion" in the coalition.

"Personally, yes the optics could have been better. There is no implosion. But the BJP is working overtime to ensure there is a minimum implosion if not a maximum implosion," Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said when asked about the developments. In the crucial State of Uttar Pradesh, which has 80 Lok

Sabha constituencies, the Samajwadi Party announced that it has offered 11 seats to the Congress, with former Chief Minister and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav asserting that their alliance is "off to a good start". Ramesh said senior leader Ashok Gehlot is holding talks with the SP chief over seat-sharing and it is taking place in a positive and constructive environment. Speaking in Karnataka, Kharge said his party expects

that those who have the desire to protect the country's Constitution and democracy, will definitely not take any

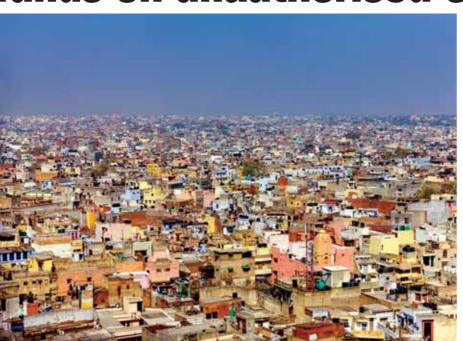
BJP slams MCD for prohibiting use of MLA funds on unauthorised colonies

 $D_{ ext{the AAP-led MCD for}}^{ ext{elhi BJP has condemned}}$ passing an order on the instruction of the party supre-mo Arvind Kejriwal and Mayor Shelly Oberoi pro-hibiting use of MLA funds on development works in unauthorised colonies and group housing societies.

Delhi BJP Spokesperson

Praveen Shankar Kapoor on Sunday said that Aam Aadmi Party supremo Arvind Kejriwal is averse to any development work in Delhi's Unauthorised Colonies & Group Housing Societies after 2022 MCD elections

Kapoor has said that in 2018 when BJP was in service in MCD at that time Arvind Kejriwal's cabinet had passed a order directing MCD to start development fund in unauthorised colonies &



In wider public interest BJP

accepted the order but once

in wards of unauthorised colonies and group housing societies Kejriwal decided to stop welfare works through MLA funds in these areas and for this Kejriwal and the Mayor have made MCD Addl. Commissioner bring out an order prohibiting MCD from doing development works in unauthorised colonies & group housing societies citing rules not allowing MCD to not to do development works therein. Delhi BJP Spokesperson has said that it is shocking to note that when BJP was in service in MCD the CM Kejriwal wanted MCD to do development works in unauthorised colonies as well as group housing societies but when he is in power in both Delhi Government and MCD the Additional Commissioner has passed order prohibiting development works in the two

Need more focused approach to resolve Noida woes: BJP

Senior BJP leader Gopal Krishna Agarwal has highlighted the problems faced by home buyers, industries, and residents' bodies in Noida and Greater Noida, saying a more committed and focused approach was required to resolve their issues.

Agarwal also pointed out the missing panchayati raj system of governance in several villages here and batted for its revival as he launched the 'Sankalp 2024: Vision Document', a white paper on the issues concerning Gautam Buddh Nagar Lok Sabha constituency and its possible solutions. 'There are several problems

that the residents of Gautam Buddh Nagar face, including home buyers, industrialists, residents' welfare associations, and apartment owners' associations," the BJP national spokesperson said at a programme in Greater Noida.



"There is potential in the district... But when we talk about the problems of Gautam Buddh Nagar, then somewhere the matters get stuck at the level of all three local authorities. A more focused approach is needed to resolve them," Agarwal said.

He pointed out that Noida has developed as an urban area but there were some rural bodies where panchayati raj governance. However, after land acquisition by local industrial development authorities, that third tier of governance in rural areas ceased to exist.

"There is a need to work towards that also," he told a gathering of hundreds of people, including representatives of local residents' bodies from villages and societies, and industries.

'This vision document is for resolving those issues. It presents examples of the work style of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, how he gets into the depth of a matter and works on solving a problem, Agarwal said. This vision document high-

lights the problems of Gautam Buddh Nagar and also provides a roadmap for their solutions. What action plan is required to resolve them, whether it is for two lakh home buyers or others," he



Mayor moves SC over transfer of power of standing panel the functions of the Standing

Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi has moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to allow the functions of the Standing Committee to be exercised by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) till the panel is constituted. The development comes less

than a fortnight after Oberoi during a special session of the MCD proposed vesting the powers of the standing committee in the House amid a ruckus with the BJP members opposing the move, which they alleged was "illegal and uncon-

The plea, in which the Lieutenant Governor's (LG) Office is the respondent, sought a direction for the smooth functioning of the civic body. It said that on May 17, 2023, the top court had reserved its verdict on a plea challenging the appointment of nominated persons in the MCD without the



aid and advice of the Delhi gov

The adjudication of the legality of the nominated persons' appointments will directly and substantially impact the election of 12 out of 18 members of the Standing Committee, i.E. It will directly determine the special majority within it. Thus, the Standing Committee could

not be constituted yet," Oberoi said in her plea.

It said that while the judgement of the court is awaited, the functions of the Standing Committee like granting approval to the MCD Commissioner to enter into any contract involving an expenditure greater than Rs 5

issues, have come to a halt. 'The prevailing situation has affected a range of governance functions of the MCD, from the procurement of textbooks and medical supplies for MCD's schools and health centres to the maintenance of public parks, public toilets, and other amenities," the plea

Oberoi said that MCD has passed a resolution dated January 15, 2024, resolving that approvals for contracts involving expenditure greater than rupees five crores, including where approval will be normally routed through the Standing Committee, be taken by the competent authorities directly from the Corporation, with a view to alleviate the situation and preserve the interests of the citizens in Delhi.

"In view of the petitioner's constitutional responsibilities to the citizens of Delhi, the present petition has been preferred to seek a direction that Committee — pending the adjudication of the legality of the process of appointment of its electors — be exercised by the House of the MCD, i.E. The 'Corporation' composed of all the elected councillors as defined in Section 3(3)(a) of the DMC Act," the plea said. The plea said that since the MCD is the body superior to the Standing Committee, in both power and accountability, it would be appropriate for the functions of the Committee to be exercised by the MCD in its meetings, till such time the

the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and is instituting the present petition to seek appropriate directions for the smooth functioning of the MCD during the pendency of the constitution of the Standing Committee on account of the peculiar circumstances," the

panel is legally constituted.

The petitioner is the Mayor of

AAP to fight Haryana Assembly seats on its own, says Kejriwal To contest LS polls as part of INDIA bloc



STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI/JIND

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said his party will contest all the 90 assembly seats in Haryana on its own, but the Lok Sabha polls will be fought as part of the INDIA bloc. The Lok Sabha polls are due in April-May while the assembly elections are due in

"Today people only have trust in one party, which is the Aam Aadmi Party. On one side, they see Punjab, and on the other, our government in Delhi. Today Haryana is seeking a big change. In Delhi and Punjab, people made this big change earlier and now people there are happy," he said at his party's 'Badlaav Jansabha' in Ĥaryana's Jind.

The AAP will contest all the 90 assembly seats in Haryana on its own, but the Lok Sabha polls will be fought as part of the INDIA bloc, Kejriwal said. "AAP will contest on all 90 seats and we will form the

next government in Haryana and make it number 1 state in the country," he said. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was also present at the

Kejriwal said Haryana is looking for a "big change" as the people of the state are "fed

have ruled here. They have tested all the other parties and these parties have only filled their own coffers, the AAP national convener alleged.

Only the AAP can provide round-the-clock power supply and other facilities to people like it has done in Delhi and Punjab, he said. "Can the Congress, the BJP and the JJP do this? They cannot. Only the AAP can do this," Kejriwal said.

The Delhi chief minister said the rival parties used to say that if people will get zero bills then they wont get power supply. "There used to be seven to eight hours power cuts daily earlier in Delhi and Punjab, but now the people are getting round-theclock power supply. In Haryana too, we will end your power cuts," Kejriwal

The BJP-JJP coalition is in power in Haryana and its government is led by Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. Targeting the BJP-led Centre, the Delhi chief minister accused it of using all its might to arrest him and said he is not scared of going to jail. Kejriwal alleged that "they have used all its might to arrest him". "They have left the Income Tax Department, the CBI, the ED and the Delhi Police after me,"

up" with all the parties that Kejriwal said.

"I am not scared of going to jail. I belong to Haryana and I want to tell them that do not try to scare a 'Haryanawala'. I am the son of Harvana. I have the blood of Haryana inside me, I am not scared of jail," he added. It seems like the country's biggest terrorist is Kejriwal, he said.

"I am not a terrorist. These people are terrorists who have kept inflation so much high. Today, inflation is the biggest terror in every household. People are not able to meet their household expenses," Kejriwal said. Kejriwal is "kattar imaandaar" and "kattar desh bhakt", the AAP leader asserted.

"I am Lord Ram's and Lord Hanuman's follower. With inspiration from 'Ram Rajya', we are running our administration in Delhi and Punjab. We are not here for power, but to serve," he said.

Taking on the BJP-led Centre, Kejriwal said, "Today, I want to tell them that they want to finish Kejriwal. They are targeting me... I have five demands which are of 140 crore people of this country. You fulfil my five demands, I will leave politics." "I have not come here for politics. I have not come here to make money. I have not come here to be a minister or chief minister," he added.

We have got good candidates under reserved category, says JNU VC

JNU follows the reservation

policy as stipulated by the

Centre and has an existing

office memorandum which

states that no de-reservation is allowed for any category of vacancies for SC, ST or OBC.

'The interchangeability of these

categories are also not allowed."

the statement added, citing

that even the Supreme Court

has expressed the same senti-

ment against the interchange-

ability of vacancies reserved for

these categories. The Congress

to end reservations given to

SCs, STs and OBCs in posts in

higher education institutions.

alleged there is a "conspiracy"

STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

A mid criticism of UGC's draft guidelines on filling cation institutes, Jawaharlal Nehru University Vice-Chancellor Santishree D Pandit on Sunday said that no posts in the varsity have been "dereserved".

The new draft guidelines by the University Grants Commission that were in the public domain for feedback from stakeholders till January 28 suggest that a vacancy reserved for SC, ST or OBC candidates can be declared unreserved if enough candidates from these categories are not available.

The draft guidelines have received criticism from several quarters, though the Ministry of Education (MoE) on Sunday clarified that no reserved posts can be dereserved.

Issuing a clarification, Pandit, in a statement on X, said "As JNU VC I want to reiterate to all stakeholders that no posts in JNU have been de-reserved. We have got very good candidates under the reserved cate-



(JNUSU) has announced a protest against UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar on the issue on Monday. The JNUSU alleged that the

new draft guidelines were "exclusionary" and an act of "scuttling of reservation in higher education institutes". The SFI Delhi State Committee has also called for a protest at the UGC headquarters on Monday.

The draft 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)' were released in December

acid at girl outside school in Burari STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI didn't know the attacker or had

Minor held for throwing

Ahended on Sunday for allegedly throwing some acidlike substance at a girl, who he chose as his victim at random near a school in north Delhi's Burari area, police said.

The attack took place on Wednesday around 1 pm when she had gone to pick her 10year-old cousin from a school in the area's Shastri Park Extension. The incident was reported the

same day and an FIR was filed in the matter under section 326(b) and 341 of the Indian Penal Code at Burari Police Station. The chemical caused the girl a "burn-like sensation, itching and irritation on her eves, neck, and nose," a senior police officer said. After the attack, the girl was

taken to a government hospital in Burari. She was discharged after treatment, the officer said. Police formed three different teams to identify the assailant and nab him.

However, since the victim

any previous brush with him

crack the case.

"The victim, however, had no reported history of personal animosity, spurned advances, or any romantic involvement with a boy, making the incident appear as a blind case. "Unfortunately, there were no surveillance cameras at the site of the crime, which made the investigation not an easy task," Deputy Commissioner of Police (north) Manoj Kumar

Meena said. One of the police teams focused on profiling the victim, examining her social media history, past contacts, and other relevant details.

"Another team was tasked with reviewing CCTV footage from the six roads leading to the crime scene, creating a temporal map of the possible routes taken by a suspect," Meena said.

The third team, in plainclothes, positioned itself near schools with a rough description of the attacker.

a mortuary for autopsy and

further investigation is under-

way, the officer said. Metro

services were impacted for

about 15 to 20 minutes

because of the same, a senior

Many incidents of people

committing suicide at Metro Station in Delhi has come to

the fore in the recent past.

official of DMRC said.

Man commits suicide by jumping in front of metro train

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

 $A^{\text{shocking video has surfaced the internet in}}$ which a man is caught committing suicide by jumping in front of a moving train at Delhi's INA Metro Station on Saturday evening. The incident was caught on camera and the video of the incident is doing rounds on social media. It can be seen in the video that the man jumps on the track in the presence of many people on the station. The man spots the train coming to the platform, and to the surprise of the other commuters, he jumped in front of the train as soon as it reaches the platform. Commuters inside the sta-

deceased was identified as one Ajitej Singh — around 30year-old — a resident of the national capital's Satya tion at the time were left stunned by what unfolded in Niketan area. front of their eyes within a According to the police, late



on Saturday — around 7:38 pm — they received a Police Control Room (PCR) call about a person jumping in front of the metro.

CCTV camera footage showed Singh jump in front of a Samaipur Badli-bound train from platform number two, police said. "Singh was identified through a call that came on his mobile phone," a senior police officer said. The dead body was shifted to

Earlier in January, 2024, a young man died by suicide by jumping in front of a train at Mandi House metro station. As per reports, the deceased was identified as Ravi and he was a resident of Bihar. Before that, on July 3, 2023, a person committed suicide by jumping in front of a train in Delhi's Kailash Colony. The person who committed suicide was identified as 25-year-old Arjun Sharma. He was a resident of East of Kailash.

New legislations will strengthen India of tomorrow: Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the government was modernising laws keeping in view the present context and asserted that these legislations will further strengthen tomorrow's India. Addressing the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Supreme Court here, he said that with the enactment of three new criminal justice laws, India's legal, policing and investigative systems entered a new era.

"It is important to ensure that the transition to the new laws from the ones dating back to hundreds of years is smooth. In this regard, we have already started training and capacity building work for government employees," the prime minis-

Court to come forward to work towards the capacity building of other stakeholders."An empowered judicial system is a part of 'Viksit Bharat'. The government is working continuously and taking many decisions to form a trusted judicial system. The Ian Vishwas Bill is a step in this

direction. In the future, this

will reduce the unnecessary

burden on the judicial system,"

the prime minister said.

He said that the law on mediation will lessen the burden on courts as the legislation will improve the alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

The prime minister said the Supreme Court has strengthened India's vibrant democracy and given many important verdicts on individual rights have given new direction to the country's socio-political milieu.

Today's economic policies of India will form the basis of tomorrow's bright India. The laws being made in India today will further strengthen tomorrow's bright India," the prime minister said.

"Laws made today will brighten the future of India. With changes happening globally, the world's eyes are set on India, as the world's faith is growing stronger in India. In such times, it is important for India to take advantage of every opportunity given to it," Modi said.

He also noted that last week the government had approved Rs 800 crore for the expansion of the Supreme Court building. In a lighter vein, Modi hoped



the top court's infrastrucchallenging the expansion of ture. He also hinted that the ject was challenged in the Prime Minister Modi under-

lined that ease of living, ease of doing business, travel and communication, and ease of justice were the nation's top priorities. "Ease of justice is the right of every Indian citizen and the Supreme Court of India, its medium," he said. To ensure last-mile justice delivery, the prime minister noted the recent decision on phase-III of the e-courts project to improve digital infrastructure of subordinate courts. Expressing happiness at the availability of decisions in a digital format and the beginning of the project of translating Supreme Court decision in local languages, Modi hoped

may have teething troubles, but it expands the horizons to improve justice delivery. Modi also noted that India's

first woman judge of the

Supreme Court, Justice M Fathima Beevi, was recently given the Padma Bhushan.Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, other judges of the apex court, top law officers and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal were present.

Modi also launched citizencentric information and technology initiatives that include Digital Supreme Court Reports (Digi SCR), Digital Courts 2.0 and a new website of the Supreme Court. The Digital Supreme Court Reports (SCR) will make for similar arrangements in Supreme Court judgments available to the citizens of the

electronic format. The key features of digital SCR are that all 519 volumes of the Supreme Court reports since 1950, covering 36,308 cases, shall be available in a digital format, bookmarked, userfriendly, and with open access. Digital Courts 2.0 application is a recent initiative under the e-Courts project to make court records available to the Judges of the district courts in electronic form. This is coupled with the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for transcribing speech to text on a real-time

The Prime Minister also launched the new website of the Supreme Court. The new website will be in bilingual format in English and Hindi and has been redesigned with a

Judiciary needs to begin difficult conversations: CJI No reserved posts can be

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The judiciary's ability to remain relevant as an institution requires it to recognise challenges and begin "difficult conversations", Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud said on Sunday as he flagged issues like "adjournment culture" and long vacations. He also stressed on increasing the representation of marginalised sections and providing a level playing field to first-generation lawyers.

The CJI was speaking at a function organised by the Supreme Court on the occasion of the inauguration of the Diamond Jubilee Year of the establishment of the apex court in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the chief guest for the occasion.

The CJI also highlighted the demographic changes undergoing in India and said that women, traditionally underrepresented in the legal profession, now constitute 36.3 per cent of the working strength of the district judiciary.

CJI Chandrachud called for the inclusion of diverse sections of the population into the legal profession, noting the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes "is quite low both at the Bar as well as on the Bench".

Terming it as a "momentous occasion" in the history of the cases, archaic procedures and

nation, CJI Chandrachud said that women can now be seen in important positions in India. 'There is a focus on greater inclusion of the marginalised sections of society. Equally inspiring is the confidence of younger population to succeed in their professional lives,"

The Supreme Court of India came into existence on January 28, 1950. It initially functioned from the Parliament House before it moved to the present building here.

CJI Chandrachud said, "Traditionally, the legal profession was a profession of elite men. Times have changed. Women, traditionally underrepresented in the profession, now constitute 36.3 per cent of the working strength of the district judiciary.

The CJI also flagged the structural issues affecting the judi-ciary, such as pendency of lawyers – men, women and others from marginalised seg-

the culture of adjournments,

stressing that in the near

future, these issues must be

addressed. "Our effort in our work as judges and administrators must be to ensure dignity to the district judiciary, which is the first point of contact for cit-

"Our ability to remain relevant as an institution requires us to recognise challenges and begin difficult conversations," he said. The CJI said there is an urgent need to emerge from the adjournment culture to a culture of professionalism.

Second, we have to ensure that the length of oral arguments does not interminably delay judicial outcomes.

"Third, the legal profession must provide a level playing field for first-generation

ments who have the will to work and the potential to suc-

"Fourth, let us begin the conversation on long vacations and whether alternatives such as flexitime for lawyers and judges is possible," he said. He highlighted that in the

recruitment examination for Junior Civil Judges conducted in several states like Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, more than 50 per cent of the selected candidates were women. CJI Chandrachud also highlighted the recent senior designation of advocates by the Supreme Court to a record

number of women. We, as judges and administrations, cannot be ignorant of these rising aspirations.

Before the beginning of 2024, only 12 women were designated as 'Senior Advocates' in the history of the Supreme Court over the last 74 years. Last week, the Supreme Court designated 11 women from different parts of the country as Senior Advocates at one selection," he said.

The programme held in the Supreme Court premises was also attended by Union Minister of State of Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal,

serving and retired judges of the top court and the high courts and lawyers and law stu-

General Attorney Venkataramani, Bar Council of India chairman Manan Kumar Mishra and Supreme Court Bar Association President Adish C Aggarwala also addressed the gathering.

In his address, CJI Chandrachud said, "Our legitimacy will endure from the inclusion of diverse sections of the population in our system. Therefore, we need to make more efforts to bring different sections of the society into the legal profession.

"For instance, the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is quite low both at the Bar as well as on the

He added that it is the 75th year since the founding provided an opportunity to meet these challenges and step into the future with an honest assessment of our progress. "We must reflect on the jour-

ney that we have traversed and renew our pledge to uphold the Constitution within and beyond the courtrooms," the CII said. The programme was also

attended by the Chief Justices of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Mauritius, Nepal, and Sri

dereserved, clarifies MoE

other courts of the country.

The Ministry of Education ▲ (MoE) on Sunday clarified that no reserved posts can be de-reserved after draft guidelines by the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed that any vacancy reserved for SC, ST and OBC candidates can be declared unreserved if enough candidates from these categories are not available

The 'Guidelines for Implementation of the Reservation Policy of the Government of India in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)' are in the public domain for feedback from stakeholders.

The draft guidelines have drawn flak from several quarters. The Congress alleged there is a "conspiracy" to end reservation given to SCs, STs and OBCs in posts in higher education institutions and that the Modi government is only doing "politics of symbolism" on the issues of Dalits, backward classes and tribals. The JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) has announced a protest against UGC Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar on the issue on Monday. Kumar also clarified that there

reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions (CEI) in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation.

"Reservation in Central

Educational Institutions is provided for all posts in direct recruitment in Teacher's cadre as per the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) Act, 2019. "After enactment of this Act, no reserved post is to be dereserved. Ministry of Education has given directives to all the CEIs to fill up the

vacancies strictly as per the

2019 ACT," the Ministry of

Education wrote on X. The UGC chairman also posted: "This is to clarify that there has been no de-reservation of reserved category positions in Central Educational Institutions in the past and there is going to be no such de-reservation.

"It is important for all HEIs to ensure that all backlog positions in the reserved category are filled up through concerted efforts.

According to new draft guidelines by the UGC: "A vacancy reserved for SC or ST or OBC cannot be filled by a candidate other than an SC or ST or

"However, a reserved vacancy may be declared unreserved by following the procedure of de-reservation where after, it can be filled as an unreserved vacancy."

There is a general ban on dereservation of reserved vacancies in case of direct recruitment. However, in rare and exceptional cases when a vacancy in a Group A service cannot be allowed to remain vacant in public interest, the University concerned may prepare a proposal for dereservation of the vacancy giving the following information: The proposal will be required to list -- efforts made to fill up the post; reasons why it cannot be allowed to remain vacant and justification for de-

reservation. 'The proposal for de-reservation in case of Group C or D should go to the Executive Council of the University and in case of Group A or B should be submitted to the Ministry of Education, giving full details, for necessary approval. After receiving the approval, the post may be filled and reservation may be carried forward," the draft

guidelines added.

Panel to review antidefection law to be constituted soon, says Birla

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

ok Sabha Speaker Om Birla Lon Sunday said a committee to review anti-defection law will be constituted soon. Birla said this on the concluding day of the 84th All India Presiding Officers Conference in Mumbai. Birla informed that a

Committee under the Chairmanship of Speaker, Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, Advocate Rahul Narwekar, will be constituted to review the Anti-Defection Vice President and Chairman

Rajya Sabha Jagdeep Dhankar delivered Valedictory Address. Governor of Maharashtra Ramesh Bais, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha Harivansh; Speaker of Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Rahul Narwekar; and Deputy Chief Minister, Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis graced Valedictory Session and addressed the distinguished dignitaries. 26 Presiding Officers from 18 States, including 16 Speakers attended the Conference.

In his address Dhankar recalled the spectacular Republic Day celebrations on Kartavya Path that revealed our exponential, phenomenal and all around growth, cutting edge of country's woman power emerging as a unique feature besides the technological prowess, depth of Indian culture and upbeat mood of the nation.

"Disruption in legislatures is cancerous not only for legislatures but also for democracy and society. Curbing it is not optional but absolute necessity to save sanctity of legislature. No time is left we are perhaps cliffhanging and we need to awaken ourselves. It is alarmingly worrisome that disruption and disturbance in Legislatures- temples of



democracy, have assumed monstrous dimensions posing existential challenge to these institutions," the Chairman Ràjya Sabha said.

Dhankar said it is high time for Presiding Officers to invoke their authority to ensure discipline and decorum as lack of these is virtually shaking the foundations Legislatures.

Referring to the observations of Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding making legislatures paperless in his video address on inaugural day, Birla informed that Lok Sabha has achieved remarkable success in this direction through Digital

Mentioning about challenges posed by new technologies in the functioning of Legislatures, Birla spoke about telecast and broadcast of proceedings expunged by the Chair and observed that an action plan is required in this direction. Birla opined that media, including social media, should report authentic records of parliamentary proceedings.

On the day five tesolutions were adopted which were urge Parliament and State/UT Legislatures to review and align Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in accordance with the letter and spirit of our Constitution; encourage Parliament/State/UT Legislatures to take effective steps at capacity-building of

tutions and Urban Local Bodies to further help strengthening the vibrant and ancient democratic ethos of our country; recommended legislative bodies to adopt and promote emerging technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI), for improving efficiency, transparency, productivity and engagement with citizens; recognising the important role of Legislative Committees and

resolve that AIPOC will take pro-active measures to implement "One Nation One Legislative Platform" for resource and experience sharing between legislatures and closer public engagement with the citizens.

On the occasion Ràjya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh

dissent in some form has always been part of the democratic set up, however, that must be within limits and adhere to the rules and procedures of the House.

These days, disruptions start from the first few days of the session and continue for several days indicating that these disruptions are often planned and meant to interrupt the primary job of the legislature," said Harivansh.

Harivansh urged to ensure better party coordination and consensus in smooth functioning of legislatures.

Railways completes employment | Pariksha Pe Charcha process for 1.5 lakh new posts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

ndia's national transporter, Indian Railway, wĥich is also the largest employer has recently completed the employment process for 1.5 lakh posts in various capacities including to address the prime concerns of safety and security of the passengers as well as property of the rail-

ways. Sources in the Ministry of Railways said that the railways' recruitment arm-Railway Recruitment Board has started with new process to bring out vacancies on a regular basis, practically every year because infrastructure and operations are increasing every year besides to counter the allegations on the BJP government in failing the employment expectations within then job seekers.

"Vacancies in multiple categories will be filled on a yeary basis. The recruitment of



5696 ALP (Loco pilots) has started. It is to be noted that the vacancies in ALP category are 3190. It means more number of recruitment process has been started than the ALPs vacancies. It is a regular process and recruitment being done as per the vacancies arise," said a senior railways official.

IR is increasing its infrastructure and operations day by day. The vacancy assessment is done for every six

than that period also. We have recently completed the employment process for 1,50,000 new employees and immediately after concluding that, we started the new process of selection of ALP's.

There will be more employment opportunities in technical and non-technical popular categories and also in Group D. To ensure more opportunities for everyone, this will be an annual process," said Railway Minister Ashwini

good medium to discuss education, exams: Modi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

Aday ahead of his annual 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' interaction with the students Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said it has become a good medium to discuss issues related to education and examinations. In his monthly 'Mann ki Baat' broadcast, Modi said over 2.25 crore students have registered for the programme this year, noting that the corresponding number was merely 22,000 in 2018 when it

was organised for the first time. The prime minister said this is one programme which he always looked forward to as it gives him an opportunity to interact with the students and he also tries to mitigate their exam related stress.

'Many innovative efforts have also been undertaken to inspire the students and spread awareness about exam related stress I urge all of you, especially the youth and students, to join in record numbers tomorrow. I too would love to talk to you,"

Shah to launch project for agri, rural banks computerisation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ **NEW DELHI**

Union Home and Cooperation Minister Home Amit Shah on Tuesday will launch the Rs 225 crore-project envisaging computerisation of offices of the Agriculture and Rural Development Banks (ARDBs) and the State Registrar of Cooperative Societies (RCSs) across the country at an event here.

This initiative, part of a broader digitalization effort, targets 1851 units of ARDBs in 13 States/UTs aims enhancing efficiency, promoting transparency, and ensuring uniformity in operations, ultimately enabling quick access to services and saving time for both administrators and the public.



The implementation involves linking these units with NABARD through a national unified software, marking a sigschemes. nificant step in modernizing the country's cooperative bank-

ing sector. Furthermore, the initiative aims at reducing transaction costs, facilitating loan distrib-

ution to farmers, and enabling real-time data access for better monitoring and assessment of

'This will benefit small and marginal farmers, connected with ARDBs for credit and related services through Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACSs) at the grassroots level," said an official from the Ministry. During the event being jointly organized by the Ministry and

national cooperative lender National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), the Minister will also launch computerization of offices of the RCS in all States and Union Territories, motivating them for e-functioning and implement an IT-oriented workflow by the Cooperative Acts and Regulations of the States and Union Territories. Along with this, its targets also include better efficiency, accountability, and transparency in RCS offices, setting up analytics, and ensuring linkage with the national database. The Primary Agriculture

Credit Societies (PACSs) are

also being enabled to start digital services by taking them on board as Common Service Centers (CSCs). So far more than 50,000 PACSs have been onboarded as CSCs and over 30,000 have already started providing services.

In addition to this, the Ministry has set up a new National Cooperative Database containing data from more than 8 lakh cooperative societies, and this database will be launched soon and made available to all stakeholders. This initiative is in line with the

Government's comprehensive strategy to modernize the cooperative sector and enhance efficiency by bringing the entire cooperative ecosystem on a digital platform, the official

Arif claim on SFI attack blatant lies: CPM

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

¬he ruling CPI(M) will continue its attacks against Governor Arif Mohammed Khan despite the Union Home Ministry's decision to upgrade his security to that of Z Plus and the deployment of CRPF commandoes to ensure his protection.

This was stated by MV Govindan, Kerala CPI (M) secretary while speaking to media persons on Sunday. Govindan, in a no-holdsbarred attack charged the Governor as liar, buffoon and stooge of the RSS. "Whatever he člaims about Saturday's

comrades are blatant lies. The people in the State have seen what happened at Nilamal (where the Governor's was intercepted by CP I(M)/SFI activists) on Saturday. The Governor is spreading falsehood across the country," charged Govindan.

The party secretary made it clear that the demonstrations and agitations against Arif Mohammed Khan would continue and the SFI activists would be provided with all help by the CPI(M). "Kerala is the best State in the country and the Governor is trying to make the Center



Government dismissed. It will not work in Kerala," said

His statement has to be read with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's views on the Centre's decision to upgrade the Governor's security and hand over the same to the CRPF. "This is unheard of anywhere in the country. The CRPF security is meant for RSS hotheads and the Governor is one among them. Even if the security is overseen by the CRPF, the Kerala Police is the only authority which is capable of arresting or prosecuting those who demonstrate the Governor,"

Karana Bhoothan) while reacting to the Center's order. Karana Bhoothan said there convoy. is no law and order problems in the State and Governor is the only person making a hue and cry over it. "There is no security threat to me or other ministers," he pointed out. as a force to provide exclusive But the chief minister's security to RSS activists.

convoy consist of nearly 60 cars/SUVs and policemen whenever he comes out in the open. The recently concluded Nava Kerala Sadass was in the news because of the high handed behavior of the cops and the party activists who

unleashed a terror across the

who dared to wave black flags at the chief minister's

V Muraleedharan, union minister of State for foreign affairs alleged that the chief minister has literally insulted and disgraced the elite CRPF

Political pundits are of the view that the CPI(M) is trying to force the Centre to Kerala dismiss the Government under Section 356 of the Constitution so that in the ensuing election the party could get public sympathy and return to

Kerala Government hikes wages of **Anganwadi** workers. helpers

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

 $T_{\text{Sunday}}^{\text{he Kerala government on }}$ wage hike for over 60,000 Anganwadi workers and helpers in the state with an increment of up to Rs 1,000. Announcing the decision, Finance Minister K N Balagopal said the wages of Anganwadi workers and helpers with more than 10 years of service would be raised by Rs 1,000.

The wages of others would be hiked by Rs 500, he said in a statement. A total of 60,232 workers in the sector would benefit from the pay hike. At present, Anganwadi workers and helpers draw a monthly salary of Rs 12,000 and Rs 8,000 respectively in the state. They would be eligible for the revised wages retrospectively from December 2023. There are 33,115 Anganwadis in the state under 258 Integrated Child Development Services

Will soon identify Rahul body double used in Nyay Yatra in Assam: Himanta

PTI GUWAHATI

ssam Chief Minister Assam Cniei iviilistei Himanta Biswa Sarma said he will soon share the name and address of the "body double" purportedly used by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the

Sarma had brought up the allegation of the Congress MP using a "body double" during the Yatra at a press conference on Thursday, during which he quoted a news report claiming that the person sitting and waving at people from the Yatra bus was "probably not Rahul Gandhi

"I don't just say things. The duplicate's name, and how it was done -- I will share all details. Just wait for a few days," the chief minister said on Saturday in Sonitpur district on the sidelines of a programme, when asked by



against Gandhi.

"I will be in Dibrugarh tomorrow (Sunday), and the next day also I will be out of Guwahati. Once I am back in Guwahati, I will give the name and address of the duplicate," he said.

The Manipur-Maharashtra Yatra, being led by Gandhi, had travelled through Assam from January 18 to 25, during which the Congress MP had alleged that Sarma was the "most corrupt CM of India". reporters about the allegation The opposition party also

alleged denial or problems in route permissions through the state by the BJP-led government. The situation reached a flashpoint when Congress leaders and workers broke police barricades erected to prevent them from entering the main city limits

An FIR was registered against Gandhi and others over the incident, with Sarma later stating that they would be arrested after the Lok Sabha polls as he did not want to "politicise" the issue prior to

of Guwahati.

Sarma maintained that the Congress will need "all the Gandhis" -- Sonia, Priyanka and Rahul - to defeat him in the state.

"Let them bring Priyanka Gandhi's son also," he said. "They have already put up their hands (in surrender). They couldn't do it through Rahul, so they will now get Priyanka and then Sonia,"

Sarma said, referring to the Congress' proposed programme in the state involving Priyanka Gandhi

On BJP and its allies' Lok Sabha poll prospects in the state, the CM said, "We have 11-and-a-half assured seats. We are working on how to convert it into 12. We are not bothered about any Congress list (of candidates).

There are 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state. Of those, nine are currently held by the BJP, three by Congress, one by AIUDF and one Independent.

Local communities target of conversion attempts: Himanta PTI DIBRUGARH (ASSAM)

Indigenous communities of India have often become "target" of conversion attempts by mainstream religions, with individuals enticed through "temptation of material benefit". Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed on Sunday.

He urged younger generations to keep alive the indigenous faiths and religions, while also outlining the measures taken by his government in this regard.

Sarma was speaking at the inaugural session of the 8th International Conference and Gathering of Elders here, which will continue till February 1.

It has been organised by the International Centre for Cultural Studies (ICCS), a non-profit socio-cultural forum for spiritual masters of ancient traditions and cultures of the world.

Emphasising the importance of indigenous faiths and culture globally as well as in India and Assam, which are home to several tribes and communities, Sarma said it is essential to preserve these age-old belief systems as these are integral to the country's cultural landscape.

"Unfortunately, indigenous communities in India often become the target of conversion efforts by mainstream religions. Missionary activities carried out by various religious groups can result in a decline indigenous faith," the CM maintained. He claimed that the "temptation of material education and healthcare benefits provided by missionary organisations influence individuals to

MP, Rajasthan CMs hold talks on Eastern **Rajasthan Canal Project**

PTI JAIPUR

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Sunday reached Jaipur to meet his counterpart Bhajanlal Sharma to discuss the long pending Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project.

The chief ministers of both the states held a joint press conference to inform that both the governments were committed to solve the drinking and irrigation water issues of the people.

"We will take the promise, which we had made with the people under the leadership of the prime minister, to the final stage very soon. There are some key issues, they will be included," Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma told reporters.

He said that with the decision of both the governments, people of 13 districts will get drinking water and 2.80 lakh hectare of land will get water for irrigation.

Addressing the press conference, Yadav said that an MoU will be signed for the

benefit of the people.
"I hope that by today evening an agreement will be ready and an MoU will be signed for the benefit of the people. It will have large scale benefits in terms of tourism, industries, educational institutes and irrigation belt. I hope that areas of both Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan will prosper," minister said. He said that it will benefit the

people of Bhind, Morena, Gwalior, Indore, Ujjain and Dewas, and seven dams will be built

He said that some issues are pending and talks at the bureaucratic level are on. A decision will be taken by the

evening, he added. Earlier, Yadav upon reaching

Jaipur Airport, had said that he has come to take a decision on water distribution of Parvati, Chambai and Kali Sindh rivers, which will benefit both the states and lakhs of farmers.

"Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan governments are going to take some decision regarding long pending river water distribution of Parvati, Chambal and Kali Sindh," Yadav told reporters at Jaipur Airport.

He further said, "The decision will not only be for the betterment of both the states, but will also change the lives of lakhs of farmers. It will open the doors for development opportunities in tourism, industries and other

Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP), an ambitious drinking and irrigation water project, was announced by the BJP government in the state permanent solution to the problem of drinking and irrigation water in 13 districts of eastern Rajasthan, namely Jhalawar, Baran, Kota Bundi, Sawai Madhopur, Ajmer, Tok, Jaipur, Dausa, Karauli, Alwar, Bharatpur and Dholpur.

Reached seat sharing understanding with some INDIA Bloc partners: Kharge

Nagaland, Manipur and

Mizoram, share a 1,643-km-

The statement said the ITLF also decided to approach the

Mizoram government for the

"political future of Kuki Zo people". More than 31,000

people from Myanmar, mostly

from the Chin state, have

taken refuge in Mizoram

following the military coup in

the neighbouring country in February 2021. Many also

Union Home Minister Amit

Shah on January 20 said in

Guwahati that the government

will end the free movement of

people at the India-Myanmar

border, and fence it completely

so that it can be protected like

the country's boundary with

took shelter in Manipur.

long border with Myanmar.

PTI KALABURAGI (KTK)

Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday said his party has held talks with all alliance partners of INDIA bloc on seat-Sabha elections, and reached an understanding with some of them, while the dialogue with others is at the final stages.

He said the Congress has already begun preparation for the Lok Sabha polls with the

Sikkim: BJP

huddle with

eye on polls

eaders of the BJP in Sikkim

Lheld a meeting to take

stock of the party's organisational strength with

an eye on the Lok Sabha polls

and assembly elections, which

are held simultaneously in the

Saturday, was attended by the

party's state president DR

Thapa, chief advisor Tseten

Tashi Bhutia and other

At the meeting, the BJP leaders discussed the party's

organisational strength, its

growth in Sikkim, and the

comprehensive roadmap for

the upcoming elections.
The party's state leadership

emphasised the importance of

strengthening the organisation

Addressing the gathering,

Thapa spoke on the importance of collective responsibility for the growth

He urged everyone to work

together, maintaining that

only through concerted efforts

the organisation can thrive

In the 32-member Sikkim

assembly, the BJP has 12

and achieve its goals.

at the grass-roots level.

The meeting, held

executive members.

formulation

of the party.

leaders in



Manipur tribal organisation to oppose

fencing of India, Myanmar border

tribal organisation in

Atribal organisation ... M a n i p u r 's Churachandpur district said it will "oppose" the Centre's

decision to fence and Indo-Myanmar border. Indigenous

Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF)

held a public consultation in

the district headquarters town

on Saturday where it was

resolved to "oppose" the

Centre's decision to fence the

Indo-Myanmar border and to

cancel the Free Movement

Regime, a statement issued by

The Free Movement Regime

allows people living on both

sides of the border to travel 16

km into each other's territory

without a visa. Four Indian

states - Arunachal Pradesh,

ITLF said.

ongoing 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' led by party leader Rahul Gandhi and his own visit to various places across the country. reporters here. On seat sharing with alliance

will be travelling to Dehradun, Odisha, Bihar, Delhi, Kerala and other places. Dates have been fixed for my visits and Rahul Gandhi will also come to a few places. We have already started our preparations. It is

Surya Saptami' on February
15 will be observed in

Rajasthan with a mass 'Surya

Namaskar' programme in all

government schools across the

Following the order of School

Education Minister Madan

Department Ashish Modi

issued an order directing all

chief district education

officers to conduct 'Surya

He said that the department

aims to make a world record

on February 15 by conducting

mass 'Surya Namaskar' by

students, parents and teachers

"The practice of 'Surya

Namaskar' has already begun

in schools. All the students are

expected to perform 'Surya

Director

Education

in morning

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Dilawar,

Secondary

Namaskar'

in all the schools.

programme, we will do, it should not be compared with other parties," Kharge told

Nyay Yatra is going on. I have partners, he said he has headed Congress leader Mukul

"The committee has already held talks with everyone with partners in Bihar, also AAP, TMC, and all our alliance partners.

Surya Namaskar to be conducted in all Rajasthan Government schools



Namaskar' along with their parents and teachers. Those with medical conditions will not participate," Modi told PTI. He said that initially the event is for one day on 'Surya Saptmi, and if the government instructs, further orders will be issued to make it a regular campaign in view of the health

benefits of 'Surya Namaskar'. Modi said that chief district education officers have been instructed in the order, issued on January 23, to conduct training of 'Surya Namaskar' to teachers and students by qualified instructors.

The director said that 'Surya Namaskar' will be performed simultaneously by students, parents, teachers, villagers in all schools on February 15 and this would become a "world

He said that education officers have also been asked to update about the number of participants by 2 pm on February 15.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Public at large is hereby informed that Late Ram Narain Gupta S/o Shri Bhagwat Kishore Gupta r/o B-9/6 DLF City Phase-1 Gurgaon, Haryana-122002 was having commercial property in joint ownership along with his son Shri Rejendra Kumar Gupta in our project Vatika One on One Pvt. Ltd. Sector 16, NH 48, Gurgaon, Haryana, Unit no 113 First Floor Block-1B admeasuring 24003 sq. ft which his tegal heir namely Rajendra Kumar Gunta requested the company to he transferred in his Gupta requested the company to be transferred in his name. Any person having any objection on this please may contact the company officer details as under within 15 days after which No Claim would be accepted.

Unit No. A-002. Ground Floor. Block A, Vatika INXT City Centre, Sector-83, Gurgaon, Haryana 122012 Contact: 09555930930

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nterested Buyers are invited to participate in the -Auction for the disposal of "Manufacturing Defected Four Wheeler Motor Vehicle Parts Bracket Trans joint Mach produced through HPDC Process, Material Grade ADC-12 (Aluminum Die Casted Component)" The salvage will be sold on "As is Where is", Whatever there is" and "No Complaint" Basis and belongs to $\,$ M/s. Ask Automotive Pvt. Ltd. The materials can be inspected at Plot No. 30-31, Village Nawada Fatehpur, Gurgaon, Haryana - 122001 on working days only between 27-01-24 to 06-02-24 between 10 AM to 5 PM. Kindly contact Mr. Sachin Kapur at 9205886798 for inspection.

E-AUCTION WILL BE HELD ON 07-02-24. Kindly contact Mr. Bibhu Jha at 8369652088 to obtain the form containing terms & conditions of e-Auction or download from website https://www.sealthedeal.co.in/.

Auctioneers: Seal The Deal having registered office at 148, Pocket C2, Sector 5, Rohini, Delhi - 110085. AST DATE OF SUBMISSION OF FORM & EMD DEMAND DRAFT IS 06-02-24.

Be it known to all concerned that the original perpetual Lease Deed, C&D Form, Original Possession Letter, Demand Letter, etc. egarding property No. C-61, East of Kailash, New Delhi-110065, with other correspondence with DDA kept in Green olour File has been misplaced/lost and it not traceable and a report in this regard has also been filed online complaint wi the Police Station Crime Branch, LF No.240802/2023 dated 14.03.2023.

Any person, Bank, Company, Financial Institution, Firm, Society, Government, Semi-Government Organization etc. etc. knowing the whereabouts or having in their ossession the above mentioned documents ay inform Mr. Pankaj Gambir on my emai D sahiba_pankaj@yahoo.co.in and Phone lo. 9312210692 and Dy. Director AB(Residential) C-3 Block, IlIrd floor, Vikas adan, DDA, New Delhi, within 15 days of

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ame of the holder: Indu Sobti Jt. Raj umar Sobti, Folio No.: 2978373

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15 days hereof.

Date: 29.01.2024

Modi wave felt across India, says Pradhan elections. He said there is a lot of party's poll symbol 'lotus' at the doorstep of the house he visited.

Plaiming that India has been witnessing a "Modi Wave", senior BJP leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday asserted that Odisha is all set to witness a major political change with the people of the state reposing trust in the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Pradhan said this while attending public booth-level contact programmes in Bhubaneswar and

"Today, entire India including Odisha has been witnessing a Modi wave. The different places and also painted the



Odisha towards the Prime Minister are increasing. Modi guarantee is the hope of people," Pradhan said. During the booth-level public contact programmes, he had breakfast and food in house of BJP workers in

Taking to X, Pradhan said, "Joined a walk at Gobindpur Siula I Pipili, the heart of rich art, culture and heritage. I put stickers on Modiji's message in every house and met the village elders, women and youths and distributed pamphlet prepared on the successful schemes implemented by the Modi government.

Speaking to reporters in the state capital, Pradhan said politics in Odisha has been taking a turn as people at the grassroots level have made up their minds to go in for a significant change in the upcoming

enthusiasm among women and youth about the Prime Minister Modi. To add to the BJP's growth, Pradhan said, "People of Odisha are reposing

their faith in the guarantee of Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the Modi guarantee," he said. "I sincerely feel that the Modi guarantee will definitely do magic in Odisha in the upcoming elections and bring a major change in the state's political scenario," Pradhan said. He said the morale of workers and leaders of BJP and youths in Odisha is high as the prime minister is scheduled to visit Odisha

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Stree shakti

The rise and rise of women power in India across sectors calls for celebrating women and womanhood

■ n recent years, India has witnessed a remarkable and inspiring phenomenon the meteoric rise of women across varied fields. From business, medicine, politics and education to science and technology, Indian women are breaking barriers, shattering stereotypes and taking giant strides in traditionally male-dominated fields. This surge of empowerment is aptly celebrated as 'Stree Shakti', highlighting the strength, resilience and capability of the nation's female force. One of the most noticeable trends in recent times is the increasing presence of women in leadership roles and entrepreneurship. Women-led businesses are flourishing, contributing not only to the nation's economic growth but also challenging the conventional gender roles. From tech startups to traditional enterprises, women entrepreneurs are carving a niche, proving that gender is not a hindrance to success. In the fields of science and technology, women are making groundbreaking contributions, redefining



the landscape of innovation. India has seen a rise in the number of women scientists, engineers and innovators who are actively involved in cutting-edge research and technological advancements. Their achievements not only propel India's progress in these domains but also inspire the next generation of women to pursue careers in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

It is indeed a matter of pride that many women contributed to the successful Chandrayaan-3, which speaks volumes about their determination. Moreover, the healthcare sector in India has been witnessing a significant transformation, thanks to the rise of

women in medicine. Women doctors, researchers and healthcare professionals are at the forefront of medical breakthroughs and advancements. Their contributions extend beyond traditional healthcare roles, influencing healthcare policies, research and the overall well-being of society. In the realm of education, women are excelling as educators, administrators and researchers. Female scholars are contributing to diverse fields of study, bringing fresh perspectives and insights to academia. While celebrating the rise of 'Stree Shakti', it's essential to acknowledge the challenges that women continue to face in their professional journeys. Gender bias, stereotypes and systemic hurdles persist, but the resilience and determination of women in India are breaking down these barriers. Organisations, both public and private, are recognising the importance of gender diversity and actively working towards creating more inclusive work environments. The Prime Minister's clarion call for 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padao' is indeed a laudable step but the real challenge is to change people's mindset. Rising women power in India is not only about today's achievements but also about paving the way for future generations. The celebration of 'Stree Shakti' is a celebration of diversity, equality and the collective strength of a nation on the path of progress.



Artistes who participated in the 75th Republic Day parade perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, in Delhi

Charting a path for Hindu-Muslim unity



The historic consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya signifies not just a momentous event but a call for reconciliation

very battle must end, so must every dispute. Killings are more easily forgotten than the destruction of buildings. But when a residence of the divine is destroyed, it is unforgettable. For a Hindu, a mandir is a residence of God. The reason is that an elevated human soul either meets the divine or obtains a glimpse of Him as Ramakrishna Paramahansa did. This is very different from a synagogue, church or mosque, all of which are merely prayer halls. Their respective faiths and adherents do not consider them to be residences of the divine.

January 22, 2024 is now behind us. It has been an epoch-making day, led by the man who made it possible. The Prime Minister's consecration of Shri Ram Lalla at Ayodhya marked the return of Lord Rama to his abode on earth after 500 years of not only waiting, but ceaseless struggle and sacrifices. Ever since Mughal invader Babar's henchman Mir Baqi destroyed the original temple at Ayodhya in 1528 AD, Hindus never gave up the struggle to reclaim the birthplace of Rama. The history of battles waged by the Hindu faithful is a long one, but December 6, 1992 was the day when the edifice known as Babri Masjid was sent to the dust. But, as our Prime Minister has said, now is perhaps the time for reconciliation.

The Somnath Temple at PrabhasPatan near Veraval (Gujarat) was destroyed by the Turkic marauder Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 A.D. Even after a thousand years later, the devilish crime has not faded from Hindu memory. Thereafter, of course, several thousand temples have been demolished or desecrated. By European traditions and the way they have conducted their politics, the dispute over these desecrations and loss caused should have been settled before New Delhi agreed to part with the share of pre-1947 India's assets to akistan at the time of Partition. Unfortunately, nothing was done. Instead, more temples were destroyed even in the Kashmir Valley, where India ruled.



Very broadly, the desecrated temples can be divided into two categories. Until the period of the Lodi Sultanate, which began from 1451 onwards, and the spread of its rule over certain regions of northern India, Islamic invaders intruding into the country were not accompanied or followed by their architects. The pre-Lodi Muslim sultans therefore, converted temples into mosques readily by smashing the edifice along with the moortis (idols) inside the sanctum sanctorum, and replacing them with mehrabs (a niche in a mosque, which indicates the qibla, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca) to face Mecca and a minbar (pulpit) of steps, whereupon the imam stands every Friday to deliver his khutba (Islamic

Many temples were broken down and converted into such mosques. A prominent example of such a conversion

sermon).



ABOUT 200 TO 300 SUCH CONVERTED **RE-CONVERTIBLE** EDIFICES. THEY COULD BE RETURNED TO HINDU INSTITUTIONS, WHILE THE THOUSANDS OF

RECYCLED ONES

COULD BE LEFT

ALONE

THERE WOULD BE

this particular conversion was effected within sixty hours of the desecration of the original Hindu place of worship, because ShahbuddinGhori was in a because hurry to pray on his return journey via Ajmer. His slave Qutbuddin Aibak obediently had the conversion executed within two and a half days for his master and badshah to pray when he returned. The erstwhile temple had actually been a complex of three temples, which were promptly combined and converted into a mosque-like edifice. It is therefore, even now, in a condition to be reconverted into a temple, almost equally quickly. There would be about 200 to

is the Dhai Din kaJhopra,

which stands at about a fur-

long's distance from the pop-

ular Ajmer Sharif dargah.

The odd name signifies that

300 such converted and reconvertible edifices. They could be returned to Hindu institutions, while the thousands of recycled ones could be left alone, as a gesture for the process of reconciliation. These were the temples that were broken down almost to the plinth level and reconstructed with the debris being utilized in such reconstruction. The reconstruction using the same debris was done in Islamic style. These

are present in the country by the thousands, with 3,000 of them having been catalogued after being identified either with documentary evidence

and/or epigraphs. These latter structures could be left alone with an apology for having reduced them to such a state, along with an undertaking that such criminal acts shall not be repeated. An undertaking must also be given that the restored temples handed over o Hindu institutions and bodies will be given away irrevocably, and no claim on them whatsoever shall ever be made in the future.

Other issues too, will inevitably come up. As part of the process of reconciliation, issues such as the uniform civil code-which are part of the Constitution of India, but as a Directive Principle-should be dealt with suitably. So also should the issue of the outdated and debilitating waqf, called a "dead hand" by a former chancellor A.A.Á. Fyzee. The intention must be to not keep pending any ongoing irritant between the two communities. Let peace and

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

goodwill prevail.

Virtual reality and Al will transform real estate market



Artificial Intelligence and data analytics are empowering real estate professionals with actionable insights and predictive analytics

≺he integration of technology into the real estate sector is ushering in a new era of innovation and efficiency. As digital transformation accelerates, emerging technologies are poised to reshape the property landscape, offering unprecedented opportunities for stakeholders across the industry. Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies are revolutionising the property viewing experience. By offering immersive virtual tours and interactive floor plans, these technologies enable prospective buyers and tenants to explore properties remotely, thereby expanding market reach and enhancing customer engagement. In 2024, VR and AR applications will become increasingly sophisticated, offering personalised experiences.

Blockchain and Smart Contracts: Blockchain technology and smart contracts are transforming property transactions by enhancing security, transparency, and efficiency. By creating immutable digital records and automating contract execution, these technologies

mitigate fraud risks and streamline the conveyancing process. In the coming years, the adoption of blockchain and smart contracts will become more widespread,

enabling seamless, secure,

and cost-effective real estate transactions. AI and Data Analytics Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics are empowering real estate professionals with actionable insights and predictive analytics. By analyzing market trends, identifying investment opportunities, and optimizing property management processes, AI-driven solutions are enhancing decisionmaking capabilities and driving operational excellence. As AI algorithms become more advanced and data analytics tools more sophisticated, the integration of these

redefine the real estate industry's competitive landscape. In conclusion, the fusion of technology and real estate in 2024 is not merely a trend but a seismic shift that promises to redefine the very essence of property transactions and experiences. This transformative journey unfolds across multiple dimensions, each offering a unique blend of innovation, efficiency, and

opportunity. At the forefront, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) are revolutionizing property exploration, transcending the limitations of physical distance and enabling prospective buyers and tenants to embark on immersive journeys through properties from the comfort of their homes. The evolution of these technologies in 2024 is set to introduce personalized experiences that resonate with individual preferences, thereby amplifying market reach and fostering deeper connections between properties and potential occupants. Parallelly, the emergence of Blockchain technology and smart contracts is

ushering in an era of unprece-

technologies will continue to dented security, transparency,

and efficiency in property transactions. These innovations are not only mitigating fraud risks but also reimagining the conveyancing process, paving the way for seamless, secure, and cost-effective transactions that resonate with the demands of the modern era.

Furthermore, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics is empowering real estate professionals with a treasure trove of actionable insights and predictive capabilities. These advancements are not only enhancing operational excellence but also shaping a future where data-driven strategies and insights drive growth,

innovation, and success. Beyond the technological innovations, the real essence lies in the transformative impact these advancements are poised to create. In essence, as we venture further into 2024 and beyond, the confluence of technology and real estate is paving the way for a new era characterised by innovation, efficiency, and opportunity.

(The writer is an industry expert; views expressed are

THE CYCLE OF LIFE

Sir — Birthday, a joyous bell, tolls yearly, awakening us to life's transient journey, as articulated by Kannada litterateur Ravasam Bheemasena Rao, aka 'Beechi.' Each celebration veils the inexorable march from newness to oldness, a reminder of aging. The initial birthday elates parents, but with time, the sheen fades. Aging, though golden at times, heralds the onset of the end. Birth mirrors morning's welcome, while death echoes evening's farewell—a cyclical journey from vitality to fatigue in life's fleeting pas-

Demise carries inherent sadness, its intensity shaped by one's connection to the departed. The passing of those deemed anti-national or anti-social elicits little collective grief; their demise isn't labeled as such by society. While family may mourn, society often finds relief. Birth heralds joy, death, sorrow—yet in troubled families, each birth may sow discord, each death easing societal burdens. Happiness at birth prevails, sorrow in death is the norm, not the exception.

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

SHETTAR'S 'GHAR WAPSI'

Sir — Opportunism and greed have overruled all values in politics. Days before the Karnataka assembly elections in May 2023, former Karnataka Chief Minister Jagadish Shettar had joined the Congress miffed over being denied a ticket. Unfortunately, though the party comfortably romped home, Shettar lost in his bastion. But despite the defeat, he was made a member of the state legislative council. Now, after nine months in Congress, Shettar is back in the BJP. Political circles are agog with reasons for Shettar's " ghar wapsi" but one cannot overlook the fact that he is the same person who had declared that he would never return to the BJP in his lifetime.

There is no doubt that Shettar, being a powerful member of the influential Lingayat community in Karnataka, has contributed to the rise of BJP in the state.

Dietary controversy

THE EDITOR



he move that has ignited widespread criticism, the Maharashtra government has decided to mark the food preferences of students on their identity cards, distinguishing between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. The contentious decision aims to streamline the dis

tribution of specific food items, namely bananas for vegetarians and eggs for non-vegetarians, under the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti scheme. The state's school education department had previously announced the inclusion of additional items in midday meals to enhance nutritional value, introducing bananas for vegetarians and eggs for non-vegetarians.

A recent department circular recommends using visible red or green dots on students' ID cards to signify their dietary preferences, causing widespread criticism from educators who deem it unnecessary. Critics argue that the classification, indicating egg consumption consent, may not consider occasional exceptions, especially in diverse cultural backgrounds. Religious sentiments, particularly concerns about offending vegetarians, further complicate the implementation. The circular's practicality is also questioned, as objections highlight potential issues with this rigid system.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

The BJP is wary of the fact that his deserting the party could have resulted in some of its candidates losing the elections in the Kittur Karnataka region. With the allimportant general elections a few months away, the BJP wants to leave nothing to chance. Shettar may also have struck a deal. That being said, the party would have sent a great message to all turncoat politicians had it declined to welcome Shettar

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

WOMEN POWER AT KARTAVYA PATH

Sir — The 75th Republic Day celebration turns more glorious with the maximum participation of Women this time in the Republic Day parade. For the first time in history, a women tri-service contingent marches down the Kartavya Path, showcasing the Women's Power of New India. The 100 women artists heralded the parade invocation with their musical band. later Monika Lakara commended

her team. CISF contingent is also led by Kashyap Monika, Megha Nayak commended Ambika Patil commended the ITBP marching band, Jaya Sharma commended the SSB band, and so on.

Watching Indian women march proudly along the Kartavya Path on the 75th Republic Day is profoundly touching. Their gallantry embodies the fulfillment of their responsibility to the nation. The delightful spirit of Nari Shakti, evident in their jubilant participation, fills every Indian with a sense of triumphant pride. This inclusive celebration signals to the world our commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. Witnessing women leading development in a new India transforms every celebration into a true jubilation, an honor to

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneér@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN

TEACHERS ARE THE PIVOT OF EDUCATION

A satisfied teacher can contribute a lot to the well-being of pupils



he culture of work ethic rests on delayed gratification, hypercompetitiveness and the perpetual need to outperform what machines can do. The outcome is often disappointment and life dissatisfaction. Living in a so-called modern-day technological world, a workplace environment today has a direct impact on job satisfaction. Of course, money, work-life balance and diversity play a crucial part, but being fulfilled and happy at your job is a hard feeling to beat. A favourable work environment can boost morale, motivation, teamwork, performance and production whilst a poor work environment can contribute to high levels of stress, anxiety and burnout. It is a well-established reality that organizations in the world today can no longer survive without focusing on their employees.

If they have to be at a competitive edge, they have to invest in their human resources and place them on top priority. Studies have even found that more than half of job seekers would reject a job offer if they found that the company to which they are looking forward had a bad workplace culture as it can negatively impact their mental and physical well-being and above all their career growth. The Indian Education System for instance is facing a continuing concern in terms of recruiting and retaining its quality teachers.

It is widely acknowledged that teachers have a pivotal role in the development of an inclusive education system for it is believed that the teacher is the most vital single factor of influence in the system of education. Colleges and universities are becoming increasingly accountable for teaching outcomes to meet rigorous accred-



itation standards. It is the teacher who matters most as far as the quality of education is concerned. A well-adjusted and satisfied teacher can contribute a lot to the well-being of his/her pupils.

It is in the interests of educational institutions and the systems to ensure that levels of job satisfaction are held high so that the main focus of educational institutions, is not hindered. Job satisfaction in any field of work depends a lot on how conducive the work envi-

Poor working conditions, low levels of pay, no scope for career advancements and lack of recognition will definitely result in increased rates of absenteeism, poor productivity, frustration and even high turnover rates resulting in a decline in target achievement and finally its closure. Employee turnover affects the productivity of the company.

An employee may serve in an organization for a long time provided that he/she is contented with his/her work. The behavior of an employee also depends on their satisfaction. When a worker is satisfied and contented, he tends to behave well for it has been often said, "A Happy Employee Is a Productive Employee."Remember, job satisfaction is like a high-wire balancing act, with multiple factors constantly in play. There is nothing more discouraging in the workplace than being insecure about the job.

Human resources are the most important resources in any organisation and in order to ensure that an organisation can compete with other firms, retaining efficient and experienced employees is the first and foremost step.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Historical factors at play in Israel-Palestine conflict



This conflict finds its roots in history that spans over a century when the Zionist movement, advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, gained momentum

he past 114 day-long Israel-Palestine war has an immediate as well as a long historical context: the immediate context of the war is the Hamas attack killing 1200 and taking 120 Israeli civilians as hostages on October 7 last year; while its long history begins with the proposal to establish the Jewish homeland, Israel, in this region after their dispersion from European countries. During the first world-war, the proposal gets impetus and the 'conflict' becomes intense with the British promising Jews to help them set up the Jewish homeland in Palestine after the collapse of Ottoman Empire for their influence on the US to support the postwar policies of the Britain. The conception and claim of homeland by the Jews dispersed from Europe on the same swathes of land where a mix of Muslim, Jew, and Christian population is already in place holding their identity as Arabs or Palestinians generates a 'conflict' of Jewish-Israeli nationalism pitted against the Palestinian-Arabic nationalism.

The 'conflict' gains intensity at the revelation of the three self-contradictory agreements made by the British authorities during this time for their own imperialist interests treating the region as 'terra nullius' or 'booty of the war': these agreements are famous as the 'Hussein-McMahon Correspondence' (1915-1916), the 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' (1916) and the 'Balfour Declaration'(1917).

The 'Hussain-McMahon

Correspondence' promised Arabs the independence of Palestine in exchange for their support for the British against the Ottoman (Uthman) Empire in the First World War, yet, on the other hand, in contradiction the 'Balfour Declaration', promised the Jews their 'homeland' in the Palestine. But after the war, using 'Sykes-Picot Agreement' between the British and the French, the British took Palestine region under their 'Authority' securing a safe access to India through the Suez Canal and the Persian Gulf but deepening the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The Palestine region remained under the British Authority until 1948 and between 1917- 1948, emigration of Jews in Palestine and the Israel-Palestine conflict swelled in parallel. In 1930, the Arabs launched a revolt against the British colonial rule in Palestine and its policy of lewish resettlement here, which resulted in a plan to partition Palestine into the Jewish and Arab states leaving Jerusalem under international administration. The Jewish leaders accepted but the Arab states and the Palestinians rejected the propos-

On the other hand, during the Second World War, the Jewish Holocaust campaign in Germany and some other European countries left the Jews homeless. In August 1945, by the American President, Truman's appeal to the British Prime Minister, Attlee, to settle 100,000 Nazi Holocaust victims in Palestine, America also joined the powers that would determine the future of Palestine, though neither America nor Britain offered them refuge in America or Britain. The Arabs sympathized with the displaced Jews, but opposed the creation of Israel on the Palestinian territories. America and Britain continued to orient their policy on Palestine to their convenience.

Tired of the Second World War and directly dealing with the civil war in





DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE JEWISH **HOLOCAUST** CAMPAIGN IN GERMANY AND SOME **OTHER EUROPEAN** COUNTRIES LEFT THE **JEWS HOMELESS**

Palestine, the British government ended its Authority over Palestine at midnight on 14 May, 1948 leaving the Jewish-Arab factions fighting each other during the civil war. On the same day the Jewish leadership in Palestine announced the establishment of the State of Israel. The birth of Israel from a violent war caused the displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinian-Arabs. It is called by the Jews the 'War of Independence' but by the Palestinians as the 'Nakba' meaning 'destruction and desolation'. Since then Palestine has been a land of 'conflicts', 'battles' and third party 'peace agreements'. The current 'Israel- Palestinian war' building on more than 100 ears of conflict and internecine battles for their 'homelands' in the same geographical territories is guided by the right-wing nationalism on both sides, with the external third party players consistently present to fulfil their (neo)colonial interests.In the 2023-24 Israel-Palestine war, Israel and Hamas or Palestine are the parties directly in conflict, and much of

remains elusive. One breed of third party players is of those coerced into war and circumscribed by their regional geographical, cultural and historical existence; they are affected by what happens in the region. But there is another breed of third

the discussion about the war is

usually focused on 'who of the

immediate players in the war is

more culpable' and 'who of the two

has a stronger claim for its "home-

land' in the same region, while the

role of third parties in the war

party extra-regional powers in the war whose presence is guided by their geo-political and economic interests; they act as catalysts to turn the 'conflict' into a 'war' and choose between 'right' and 'left' to their convenience. To understand the multifaceted politics of the Israeli-Palestinian war, it is also important to describe the role of these catalyst forces at work behind

the war. By vetoing the UN proposal for 'immediate ceasefire' America and Britain have helped the war to inflame and by sanctioning the sale of weapons and ammunition twice, America has fuelled the war and encouraged the rightwing Israeli government passion for displacement of Palestinian population.In the name of eliminating Hamas and their bases, the indiscriminate heavy bombardment by Israel, with the unflinching support and encouragement by the US, has led to the mass destruction of ordinary Palestinian civilians. Israel's current war against Hamas is in reality a war against Palestinians. The Israel-Palestine war of 2023-24 is the worst not only because the majority of the dead are civilians but also because it is being fought like a genocide. The right-wing Israeli government, led by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, wants complete Israeli control in Palestine and does not recognize any role for the Palestinian Authority. Two Israeli ministers of the Israeli government have revealed their ideology by their advice to the Palestinians to leave

The American support has rein-

forced such an ideology. Facing challenges from within and without, pressure from the countries of West Asia and fear of Israel becoming more intransigent, America has reviewed its policy in Palestine. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has met with the leaders of Turkey, Qatar and Jordan on his fourth diplomatic tour of West Asia to drum up support for the US post-war plan of 'two states' and reconstruction of Gaza. In a press conference he has said that the Palestinians should not be pressured to leave Gaza.

But the US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller's comments on a lawsuit in the South Africa against Israel for committing 'genocide' contradict its 'peace proposal' and exposes its position on displacement.

On the one hand, America's support for a 'two-state solution' and criticism of Israel's claim for Jewish state on the whole region, but on the other hand, billions of dollars annual US aid to Israel for years and sale of arms during the war and veto of UN proposal for 'immediate ceasefire' exposes its ambivalent policy on Gaza and cleverness as of Britain during the First World War. After all, Israel is using the US aid and weapons to occupy Palestinian territories and disperse the Palestinian popula-

(The writer is retired professor Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar and member, Governing Council, INTECH; views are personal)

Unsung heroes in Padma awards list to boost heritage preservation

Among the latest Padma Shri awardees, 34 were ordinary citizens, including tribals and those working for tribal welfare

→he Padma Awards, the prestigious civilian honours in India, are announced annually on the eve of Republic Day. These awards aim to acknowledge achievements across various fields where a component of public service is evident. The history of the Padma Awards dates back to 1954 when the Government of India established two civilian awards-Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan. The latter initially had three classes: Pahela Ýarg, Dusra Varg, and Tisra Varg. They were later renamed Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, and Padma Shri through a Presidential Notification issued on January

Even though the Padma award



BIJU DHARMAPALAN celebrated people since 1954, it was only from 2014 onwards that it started focusing on the common man. Till then, it was a distant dream for a commoner to aim for the award. Even when we recognise a scientist working in the lab for their note-worthy contributions, we often forget the thousands of real 'scientists' who work on the field utilising the knowledge they gathered through the ages from their forefathers. There are great farmers who

eties and cultivation packages. There are great tribal healers who can cure diseases even without the least knowledge of modern science. There are great conservation biologists who know how to conserve nature without any under-standing of ecology. There are excellent climatologists who can predict weather simply by looking at the changes happening in nature. There are exemplary people working in astronomy, metallurgy, engineering and other fields. These people work selflessly for the benefit of society without realising even the significance of their work for society. Behind every architectural marvellance or artistic work, there is the craftsmanship of our skilled labour force. has been bestowed on various are developing new plant vari- Unfortunately, people recog-



not the hand that made it hap-

There are thousands of such people who live amongst us without seeking any attention. They may not hold a PhD degree or a professional degree, but their knowledge and scientific skills are more than those of a trained scienShri awardees, it was announced that 34 were such ordinary people, of whom more than one-third are tribals or those who have worked for tribal welfare. The prominent unsung heroes include Parbati Baruah, fondly known as "Hathi ki Pari," a female eletrainer from Goalparahas, Assam. Defying recognised include Sarbeswar knowledge, it will become

deep-rooted stereotypes, Baruah has devoted four decades to addressing human-elephant conflicts. Her scientific methodology has supported three state governments in effectively managing and capturing troublesome tuskers, illustrating the effectiveness of challenging conventional The farming community is

doing yeoman service for the nation and humanity. It's appreciable that many farmers found a place on this year's Padma list. Sathyanarayana Beleri, the rice farmer from Kasaragod, conserves 650 traditional rice varieties on his farm without any sophisticated infrastructure, which even ICAR institutions don't do. Other farmers who were

Basumatary, the tribal farmer from Chirang, Assam; K Chellammal, an Organic farmer from Andaman; Yanung Jamoh Lego from Arunachal Pradesh and Sanjay Anant Patil of Goa. Many people who work in nature conservation, folk arts and craftmanship have also been recognised.

The knowledge these exceptional people garnered was passed down through generations orally and is not documented properly. The knowledge is shared only among the close family members. In most cases, the second generation shifts away from the traditional workforce, moving toward more lucrative urban jobs. In the long run, if there are no takers for this traditional

extinct, as happened to the Indian Knowledge system. Modi government's initiative to recognise such people is a futuristic vision to preserve the remnants of still-prevailing Indian knowledge. This will revive interest in their community to carry forward the great work their forefathers have been doing. Recognition through a coveted award like Padma Shri will also provide them respect from other members of the society. The government has fostered a sense of self-confidence and admiration for one's work by making the Padma award accessible to the common man.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, views are personal) the pioneer

UN chief calls for resumed funding of Palestinian aid agency Netanyahu's popularity has

AP RAFAH (GAZA STRIP)

The secretary-general of the ■ United Nations on Sunday called on countries to resume funding the main agency providing aid in the Gaza Strip after a dozen of its employees were accused of taking part in the Hamas attack on Israel that ignited the war four months

The dispute engulfing the UN agency for Palestinian refugees came as US officials said negotiators were closing in on a cease-fire agreement. The emerging deal would bring a two-month halt to the deadliest-ever Israeli-Palestinian violence, which has stoked instability across the Middle

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the agency known as UNRWA would be forced to scale back aid to more than 2 million Palestinians in Gaza as soon as February. The coastal enclave is in the grip of a severe humanitarian crisis, with a quarter of the population facing starvation as fighting and Israeli restrictions hinder the the besieged territory. "The abhorrent alleged acts of these staff members must have consequences," Guterres said in a

But the tens of thousands of men and women who work for UNRWA, many in some of the most dangerous situations for humanitarian workers, should not be penalised. The dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met," he added.

He said that of the 12 employees accused of taking part in the attack, nine were immediately terminated, one was confirmed dead and two others were still being identified. He said they would be held accountable, including through criminal prosecution.

A GAZA LIFELINE AT RISK OF COLLAPSE

UNRWA provides basic services, from medical care to education, for Palestinian families who fled or were driven out of what is now Israel during the 1948 war surrounding the country's creation. They now live in built-up refugee occupied West Bank, Jordan,

The refugees and their descendants number about 6 million, and in Gaza they are the majority of the population. UNRWA, which has some 13,000 staff members in Gaza, expanded its operations during the war and runs shelters that house hundreds of thousands of newly displaced people.

More than 2 million of the

territory's 2.3 million people depend on the agency's programmes for "sheer survival", including food and shelter, UNRWĂ Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini said. It's a lifeline that could "collapse any time now", he said after the funding was sus-

The United States, which is the agency's largest donor, immediately cut funding over the weekend, followed by eight other countries, including Britain, Germany and Italy. Together, the nine countries rovided nearly 60 per cent of NRWA's budget in 2022.

The Israel-Hamas war has killed more than 26,000

health officials, destroyed vast nearly 85 per cent of the territory's people. The October 7 Hamas attack into southern Israel that sparked the war killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants

took about 250 hostages to

CEASE-FIRE TALKS

Two senior Biden administration officials said US negotiators were making progress on a potential agreement under which Israel would pause military operations against Hamas for two months in exchange for the release of more than 100 remaining

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive negotiations, said that emerging terms of the yet-tobe sealed deal would play out over two phases, with the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released by Hamas in a first 30day phase. The emerging deal also calls for Israel to allow

More than 100 hostages, mainly women and children, were released in November in exchange for a weeklong ceasefire and the release of 240 Palestinians imprisoned by

CIA Director Bill Burns is expected to discuss the contours of the emerging agreement when he meets on Sunday in France with David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel.

Despite the apparent progress, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reiterated in a televised news conference late Saturday that the war would continue until "complete victory" over Hamas. Netanyahu also lashed out at the mass protests held by families of the hostages and their supporters calling for another cease-fire and exchange deal. He said the demonstrations "strengthen the demands of Hamas".

plummeted since October 7 and he has faced mounting protests demanding new elections, with many Israelis blaming him for the unprecedented security failures that day as well as the plight of the hostages. Tens of thousands of Israelis join weekly Saturday night protests in Tel Aviv, and recently dozens of relatives of

ISRAEL UNDER SCRUTINY AFTER COURT RULING

in Caesarea.

the hostages have started protesting outside of Netanyahu's private residence

The dispute over UNRWA came as the International Court of Justice ruled Friday that Israel must do its utmost to limit death and destruction in its Gaza offensive and facilitate more humanitarian aid.

The binding ruling stopped short of ordering a cease-fire, but was in part a rebuke of Israel's conduct in the war. The case brought by South Africa to the UN court alleged Israel is committing genocide, which Israel vehemently denies. A final ruling is

The amount of aid entering Gaza remains well below the daily average of 500 trucks before the war, and UN agencies say distribution has been severely hampered by the fight-

ing and delays at Israeli checkpoints. In the past week, family members of the hostages and their supporters have blocked aid trucks from entering Gaza at the Kerem Shalom crossing, contributing to the backlog. On Sunday, dozens of protesters again blocked the entry, chanting "No aid will cross until the last hostages return." Leter in the day, the return." Later in the day, the military declared the area around the crossing a closed military zone, which would

prohibit protests there. The move appeared aimed at ensuring the crossing can function. Israel holds Hamas responsible for civilian casualties, saying the militants embed themselves in the local popu-

Israel says its air and round offensive in Gaza has killed more than 9,000 militants, without providing evi-

US sees signs of progress on deal to release hostages

Washington (AP): US negotiators are making progress on a potential agreement under which Israel would pause military operations against Hamas in Gaza for two months in exchange for the release of more than 100 hostages who were captured in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, according to two senior administration offi-

The officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive discussions, said Saturday that emerging terms of the yet-to-be sealed deal would play out over two phas-

In the first phase, fighting would stop to allow for the remaining women, elderly and wounded hostages to be released by Hamas.

Israel and Hamas would then aim to work out details during the first 30 days of the pause for a second phase in which Israeli soldiers and civilian men would be released. The emerging deal also calls for Israel to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza.

While the proposed deal would not end the war, US officials are hopeful that such an agreement could lay the groundwork for a durable resolution to the conflict.

The New York Times first reported on Saturday that progress has been made towards an agreement for a pause in fighting in exchange for the remaining hostages.

CIA director Bill Burns is expected to discuss the contours of the emerging agreement when he meets on Sunday in France with David Barnea, the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, and Egyptian intelligence chief Abbas Kamel for talks centered on the hostage

President Joe Biden on Friday spoke by phone with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani. Calls with both leaders focused on the

Mali, Niger & Burkina Faso withdraw from West Africa regional bloc ECOWAS

West African nations Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have withdrawn from the regional economic bloc known as ECOWAS, their respective juntas announced Sunday, accusing the bloc of "inhumane" sanctions to reverse the coups in their nations.

The juntas said in a joint statement read out on state television in all three countries that they have "decided in complete sovereignty on the immediate withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from the Economic Community of West African States (ECÓWAS)," alleging that the bloc has "moved away from the ideals of its founding fathers and pan-Africanism" after nearly 50 years of its establishment.

"Furthermore, ECOWAS, under the influence of foreign powers, betraying its founding principles, has become a threat populations whose happiness it is supposed to ensure," their statements read.

Widely seen as West Africa's top political and regional authority, the 15-nation bloc of ECOWAS formed in 1975 to "promote economic integration" in member states — has struggled in recent years to reverse rampant coups in the region where citizens have complained of not benefitting from rich natural resources. It's not immediately clear how that process of the countries' withdrawal from the bloc would be carried out. ECOWAS didn't immediately respond to an Associated Press inquiry, though the bloc has said it only recognises democratic governments. The bloc's regional court also ruled last year that juntas lack the power to act in place of elected gov-ernments on behalf of their

Sunday's announcement is the latest twist in a series of events that have deepened political tension in West Africa since it experienced its latest of a string of coups — in Niger last year. It also comes as the three nations have formed a security alliance after severing military ties with France and other European nations and

turning to Russia for support. The joint statement accused ECOWAS of failing to assist those three countries in fighting "existential" threats like terrorism — the common reason cited by their militaries for deposing their democratically elected governments.

"When these States decided to take their destiny into their own hands, it (ECOWAS) adopted an irrational and unacceptable posture in imposing illegal, illegitimate, inhumane and irresponsible sanctions in violation of its own texts," the statement noted

Climate activists throw soup at glass protecting Mona Lisa

 $T\ \ \ wo\ \ climate\ \ activists\ \ hurled$ soup on Sunday at the glass protecting the Mona Lisa at the Louvre Museum in Paris and shouted slogans advocating for a sustainable food system. This came amid protests by French farmers against several issues, including low wages.

In a video posted on social media, two women with the words "FOOD RIPOSTE" written on their t-shirts could be seen passing under a security barrier to get closer to the painting and throwing soup at the glass protecting Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece."What's the most important thing?" they shouted. "Art, or right to a healthy and sustainable food?" "Our farming system is sick. Our farmers are dying at work," they added. The Louvre employees could then be seen putting black panels in front of the



Mona Lisa and asking visitors to evacuate the room.

Paris police said two people were arrested following the inci-

On its website, the "Food Riposte" group said the French government is breaking its climate commitments and called for the equivalent of the country's statesponsored health care system to be put in place to give people bet-ter access to healthy food while providing farmers a decent income. Angry French farmers have been using their tractors for days to set up road blockades and slow traffic across France to seek

tion against cheap imports. They also dumped stinky agricultural waste at the gates of government On Friday, the government announced a series of measures

better remuneration for their

produce, less red tape and protec-

that farmers said do not fully address their demands.

Those include "drastically simplifying" certain technical procedures and the progressive end to diesel fuel taxes for farm vehicles. Some farmers threatened to converge on Paris, starting Monday, to block the main roads leading to the capital.

New Prime Minister Gabriel Attal visited a farm on Sunday in the central region of Indre-et-

He acknowledged farmers are in a difficult position because "on the one side we say we need quality' and on the other side 'we want ever-lower prices." hostage situation.

Finns go to polls to elect new President

AP ■ HELSINKI

Voters in Finland were electing a new president on Sunday at an unprecedented time for the Nordic nation that is now a NATO member with its eastern border with Russia closed — two things almost unthinkable a few years ago. Polls across the country opened at 9 a.m. (0700 GMT) and will close at 8 p.m. (1800 GMT)

Unlike in most European countries, the president of Finland holds executive power in formulating foreign and security policy, particularly when dealing with countries outside the European Union like the United States, Russia and China. Some 4.5 million citizens are eligible to vote for Finland's new head of state from an array of nine candidates - six men and three women. They are picking a successor to hugely popular President Sauli Niinisto, whose second six-year term expires in March. He is not eligible for reelection. No candidate is expected get more than 50 per cent of the vote in Sunday's first round of voting, pushing the race into a runoff in February. Recent polls suggest that former Prime Minister Alexander Stubb, 55, and ex-Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, 65, are the leading contenders. Stubb, who represents the

conservative National Coalition Party and headed the Finnish government in 2014-2015, and veteran politician Haavisto, an ex-United Nations diplomat running for the post for the third time, are each estimated to garner 23 per cent-27 per cent of the votes. Finland's new head of state will start a six-year term in March in a markedly different geopolitical and security situation in Europe than did incumbent Niinisto after the 2018 election.

'Revolutionary changes taking place in India-US relationship'

 $R^{\text{evolutionary changes are}}_{\text{taking place in the India-US}}$ relationship, the outgoing Indian Ambassador here, Taranjit Singh Sandhu has said, stressing that the bilateral ties have only covered the tip of the iceberg and are going to go far and wide. Addressing a gathering of Indian Americans at the Republic Day celebration here, Sandhu said it is important that their second generation remains connected to

"I only wanted to tell you that today revolutionary changes are taking place in India, also in US-India relations," he said, "And therefore it is important that your children and your families are aware of India, stay connected with India," Sandhu, who retires later this month from the foreign service after more than 35 years, said As international capital and multinational companies move into



India, all the young Indian Americans will be uniquely placed to get most of those job opportunities, Sandhu said.

"So therefore, not only for emotional, cultural, and so many other reasons but also for economic and commercial reasons. pay attention, stay connected with India," Sandhu said. The event in McLean, Virginia was organised by the National Council of Asian Indian Associations. The outgoing ambassador was also felicitated by the community leaders for his role in strengthening the Indiaing at another farewell reception organised by the Indian American Business Impact Group said that the India-US relationship has so far only touched the tip of an iceberg.

"The fact is, we have only covered the tip of the iceberg. In all these sectors, this relationship is going to go far and wide," he said."We are already hearing about AI, the different dimensions of AI (Artificial intelligence). India is going to play a very, very important and critical role.

Look at any of the International Monetary Fund or World Bank projections, the recovery of the world economy India will be playing a very critical role," he said. Sandhu reiterated that for the career prospects, jobs and growth of their kids, Indian Americans should remain connected to

4 die in LA murder-suicide shooting

s Angeles ple are dead following what police in Los Angeles characterised as a murder-suicide in the Granada Hills area on

Officers responded shortly before 7 pm to a report of a shooting in the 11600 block of Lerdo Avenue and found four people who were pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators determined the shooting was a murder-suicide, the Los Angeles Police Department said.

After receiving the call, there was no answer when the officers arrived and knocked at the door, police said.

Police forced entry into the home and a survivor of the shooting directed them to three victims.

The deceased included a man in his late 40s and two women, one in her late 40s and another who was about 80

PTI ■ KATHMANDU Nepal and China will sign the implementation plan of

the Belt and Road Initiative "very soon", Deputy Prime Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha said on Saturday, nearly seven years after the two neighbours inked an agreement to undertake ambitious Beijing-backed infrastructure projects in the Himalayan nation."Once we sign the implementation plan, we will move into the implementation phase," Shrestha, also the Minister for Home Affairs said while addressing an event here that is part of the Silk Road Youth Forum and South

Asian Cooperation Conference. He said the two countries will sign the implementation plan of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) "very soon" without specifying any date. His statement came as Sun Haiyan, a senior leader of China's ruling Communist Party, was visiting

Nepal and meeting the coun- in building critical infrastructhe BRI implementation plan is the key to negotiate and execute the projects under the initiative.

Nepal, China to sign implementation

plan of BRI projects: Nepal DyPM

Nepal and China signed a Memorandum Understanding on the BRI in 2017. However, not a single project under the initiative, a pet project of Chinese President Xi Jinping, has either been execut-

ed or negotiated. The BRI, which aims to enhance connectivity and promote economic cooperation, has opened up new avenues for collaboration between the two nations, Shrestha said, adding that one of the cornerstones of Nepal-China cooperation is infrastructure development.

"For nations like Nepal, nestled in the heart of the Himalayas, these initiatives open up possibilities for enhanced connectivity that can transform the economic landscape," he said. "China's support energy projects, has been instrumental in propelling Nepal towards economic growth and stability," Shrestha

The signing of the BRI implementation plan between Nepal and China has been one of the prime agenda since early 2020 but an agreement has been elusive due to differences between the two sides over investment modality, The Kathmandu Post newspaper reported.

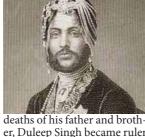
Meanwhile, speaking during an interaction programme with various political leaders of Nepal that was organised here, Sun Haiyan, the Vice Minister of the International Liaison Department of the Communist Party of China, urged the stakeholders of both nations to not get affected by the attempts by other countries to spoil ties between China and Nepal.

UK's museum gets grant to mark legacy of Punjab's last Maharajah

Amuseum in the UK has been awarded nearly 200,000 pounds in grant by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to mark the legacy of Maharajah Duleep Singh, the last ruler of the Sikh empire. Ancient House Museum in Norfolk's Thetford was awarded the money on its 100th anniversary, BBC reported. The museum was founded in 1924 by Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, the son of Maharajah Duleep Singh. The 198,059 pounds (USD

2,51,712.99) grant will be used to tell the family's story through displays, the report said.

Maharajah Duleep Singh was the youngest son of Maharajah Ranjit Singh, who founded the Sikh empire in the Punjab in 1799. After the



er, Duleep Singh became ruler of the kingdom at the age of five but was removed from the throne after Britain annexed the Punjab in 1849. At the age of 15, Duleep Singh arrived in England and later made his home at Elveden Hall in

His family remained in the area for the next century. Prince Frederick, Duleep Singh's second son, donated Thetford's Ancient House Museum to the people of the town.

Suffolk and Norfolk Yeomanry and served in World War One. The museum is now start-

ing a two-year project to showcase "the fascinating history of the Duleep Singh family", said Robyn Llewellyn, the director of England, Midlands and East for the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Norfolk County Council said the new displays would include "a sumptuous 'treasury' of Anglo-Punjab history, a model of Elveden Hall, a loan of a portrait of Duleep Singh and dis-plays marking the family's contributions and activism to achieve universal suffrage".

The museum will also exhibit the family's items, such as Duleep Singh's walking stick, which was given to him by King Edward VII when he was Prince of Wales.

Joe Biden assurances to shut down border if Congress sends him deal

AP COLUMBIA

 $B_{\text{deal in Congress that also}}^{\text{idding to salvage a border}}$ would unlock money for Ukraine, President Joe Biden offered fresh assurances Saturday night that he would be willing to close the US-Mexico border if lawmakers would only send him a bill to sign. Biden — also eager to dis-

arm GOP criticism of his handling of migration at the border — said at a political event in South Carolina that he would shut down the border "right now" if Congress passed the proposed deal. The framework hasn't been formally agreed to by Senate Democrats and Republicans and would face an uncertain future in the GOP-controlled House. "A bipartisan bill would be good for America and help fix our



broken immigration system and allow speedy access for those who deserve to be here, and Congress needs to get it done," Biden said. "It'll also give me as president, the emergency authority to shut down the border until it could get back under control. If that bill were the law today, I'd shut

down the border right now and fix it quickly." The deal being negotiated in Congress would require the US to shutter the border if roughly 5,000 migrants cross illegally on any given day. Some one-day totals last year exceeded 10,000. Former President Donald

Trump has been pressuring Republicans for weeks to kill the negotiations. He's loathe to give a win to Biden on an issue that animated the Republican's successful 2016 campaign and that he wants to use as he seeks to return to the White House. Negotiators had appeared to be closing in on a deal, but it started to fray after Trump's admonitions to conservative law-

makers grew stronger. In a written statement on Friday evening, Biden said the deal would allow him "a new emergency authority" to close the border. He added: "And if given that authority, I would use it the day I sign the bill into It was a stark claim from a

Democratic president that was met with astonishment and shock from immigrant advocates who have said his policies do not reflect the progressive approach they had expected. "Voters want to see our elected leaders do the hard

work to fix our frayed immigration system," said Deirdre Schifeling, chief political and advocacy officer at the American Civil Liberties Union. "President Biden and

Congress must abandon these proposals and heed voters' demands for fair and effective immigration policies that manage the border and treat people seeking safety with dignity.

Iran launches 3 satellites into space US flays ban on Venezuelan

Iran said on Sunday it successfully launched three satellites into space with a rocket that had multiple failures in the past, the latest for a programme that the West says improves Tehran's ballistic missiles.

The launch comes as heightened tensions grip the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip, sparking fears of a regional conflict. While Iran has not intervened militarily in the conflict, it has faced increased pressure within its theocracy for action after a deadly Islamic State suicide bombing earlier this month and as proxy groups like Yemen's Houthi rebels conduct attacks linked to the war. Meanwhile, Western nations remain worried about Iran's rapidly expanding nuclear programme. Footage released by Iranian state television showed Simorgh rocket. An Associated Press analysis of the footage showed that it took place at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's rural Semnan province.

"The roar of the Simorgh (rocket) resonated in our country's sky and infinite space," said Abbas Rasooli, a state TV reporter, in the footage. State TV named the launched satellites Mahda, Kayhan-2 and Hatef-1. It described the Mahda as a research satellite, while the Kayhan and the Hatef were nanosatellites focused on global positioning and communication respectively.



This photo released by the Iranian Defence Ministry on Sunday claims to show the launching of Simorgh, or "Phoenix," satellite carrier at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in Iran's rural Semnan province

Iran's Information and Communications Technology Minister Isa Zarepour said the Mahda had already sent signals back to Earth. There have been five failed launches in a row for the Simorgh programme, a satellite-carrying rocket. The Simorgh, or "Phoenix," rocket failures have been part of a series of setbacks in recent years for Iran's civilian space programme, including fatal fires and a launchpad rocket explosion that

President Donald Trump. The footage showed the rocket launched Sunday bore the slogan "We Can" in Farsi,

drew the attention of former US

likely referring to the previous failures. The Simorgh is a twostage, liquid-fuelled rocket the Iranians described as being designed to place satellites into a low Earth orbit.

However, the US intelligence community's 2023 worldwide threat assessment said the development of satellite launch vehicles "shortens the timeline" for Iran to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile because it uses similar technology. That report specifically cites the Simorgh as a possible dual-use rocket. The United States has previously said Iran's satellite launches defy a UN Security

on Tehran to undertake no activity involving ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. UN sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile programme expired last October. Under Iran's relatively moderate former President Hassan Rouhani, the Islamic Republic slowed its space program for fear of raising tensions with the West. However, in the time since, the 2015 nuclear deal

Council resolution and called

sions have been boiling for vears with the US. President Hard-line

Rouhani shepherded with world

powers has collapsed and ten-

Ebrahim Raisi, a protege of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who came to power in 2021, has pushed the programme forward. Meanwhile, Iran enriches uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels and enough material for several atomic bombs, though US intelligence agencies and others assess Tehran has not begun actively seeking a nuclear

weapon.
On Friday, France,
Germany and the United Kingdom condemned an Iranian satellite launch on January 20, similarly calling it capable of helping Iran develop long-range ballistic missiles.

We have longstanding concerns over Iran's activity related to ballistic missile technologies that are capable of delivering nuclear weapons," the countries said. "These concerns are reinforced by Iran's continued nuclear escalation beyond all credible civilian justification."

Tehran maintains the largest arsenal of ballistic missiles in the Mideast, in part due to decades of sanctions following its 1979 Islamic Revolution and the US Embassy hostage crisis blocking it from advanced fighter jets and other weapon systems. The US military and the State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment Sunday. However, the US military has quietly acknowledged the Januarý 20 launch conducted by the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard was successful.

The former lawmaker and longtime government foe was able to participate in the primary, because the election was

The US government and

I nearly 30 conservative

world leaders on Saturday con-

demned the decision of

Venezuela's highest court to

block the presidential candida-

cy of opposition leader María Corina Machado. The Biden

administration, however,

remained noncommittal about

reimposing economic sanc-

tions on Venezuela, which it

has threatened to do if the gov-

ernment of President Nicolás

Maduro failed to ensure a level

playing field for the country's

presidential election this year.

rently reviewing our Venezuela

sanctions policy, based on this

development and the recent

political targeting of democra-

tic opposition candidates and

civil society," US State Department spokesman

Matthew Miller said in a state-

ment. Machado won a presi-

dential primary held in

October by the faction of the

opposition backed by the US.

She secured more than 90 per

cent of the vote despite the Venezuelan government announcing a 15-year ban on

her running for office just days

after she formally entered the

"The United States is cur-

oppn leader's candidacy independent of Venezuela's electoral authorities. Machado insisted throughout the campaign that she never received official notification of the ban and said voters, not rulingparty loyalists, were the rightful decision-makers of her candidacy. Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice on Friday upheld the ban, which was based on alleged fraud and tax

violations, and accuses

Machado of seeking the eco-

nomic sanctions the U.S.

imposed on Venezuela.

The ruling came more than three months after Maduro and the US-backed opposition reached a deal to work on basic conditions for a fair election. The two sides agreed to hold the election in the second half of 2024, invite international electoral observers, and create a process for aspiring presidential candidates to appeal their bans. The deal led Washington to ease some economic sanctions on Venezuela's oil, gas and mining sectors.

Miller said that Friday's decision from Venezuela's Supreme Tribunal of Justice "runs contrary to the commitments made by Maduro and his representatives" under the agreement signed in October on the Caribbean island of Barbados. He said that the appeal process "lacked basic elements, as Machado neither

tions against her nor was afforded the opportunity to respond to those allegations."

Gerardo Blyde, the chief negotiator for the opposition group known as the Unitary Platform, said Saturday that the court's ruling violates the Barbados accord. He urged Maduro's allies to reverse it, arguing the decision as it stands constitutes a "violation of due process and the right to due defense" of Machado.

But Maduro's chief negotiator, National Assembly leader Jorge Rodríguez, on Friday insisted Venezuela's government hasn't broken the terms of the accord and vowed to hold the presidential election this year. While the opposition's candidate remains in doubt, Maduro will be seeking six more years in office. Maduro's entire decadelong presidency has been marked by political, social and economic crisis. Under his watch, millions of Venezuelans have fallen into poverty and more than 7.4 million have migrated. In a statement Saturday, the international nongovernmental organization Democratic Initiative of Spain and the Americas said that Machado "continues to be the legitimate representative of the Venezuelan opposition and its presidential candidate before the international

Ukraine says corrupt officials stole \$40 mn meant to buy arms for war

Kyiv (AP): Employees from a Ukrainian arms firm conspired with defense ministry officials to embezzle almost USD 40 million earmarked to buy 100,000 mortar shells for the war with Russia, Ukraine's security service reported. The SBU said late Saturday that five people have been charged, with one person detained while trying to cross the Ukrainian border. If found guilty, they face up to 12 years in prison.

The investigation comes as Kyiv attempts to clamp down on corruption in a bid to speed up its membership in the European Union and NATO. Officials from both blocs have demanded widespread anti-graft reforms before Kyiv can join Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected on an anti-corruption platform in 2019, long before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Both the president and his aides have portrayed the recent firings of top officials, notably that of Ivan Bakanov, former head of the State Security Service, in July 2022, as proof of their efforts to crack down on graft. Security officials say that the current investigation dates back to August 2022, when officials signed a contract for artillery shells worth 1.5 billion hryvnias (USD 39.6 million) with arms firm Lviv Arsenal. After receiving payment, company employees were supposed to transfer the funds to a business registered abroad, which would then deliver the ammunition to Ukraine. However, the goods were never delivered and the money was instead sent to various accounts in Ukraine and the Balkans, investigators said.

Pak seeks comprehensive investigation after nine labourers shot dead in Iran

Dakistan has sought a comprehensive investigation into the killing of nine of its nationals in a brutal attack in Iran that occurred days after the tensions between the two nations following a tit-for-tat cross-border fire. Nine Pakistani workers were gunned down and three others were injured by unidentified attackers who opened indiscriminate fire on them in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province near the border with Pakistan on Saturday.

Iran's Mehr news agency reported that "according to witnesses, unknown armed men killed nine non-Iranians in a house in the Sirkan neigh-

Sistan-Baluchestan province. No group or individual immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. Pakistan's Foreign Office has demanded a comprehensive investigation into the attack and swift prosecution of those responsible for it. "We are in touch with Iranian authorities and have underscored the need to immediately investigate the incident and hold to account those involved in this heinous crime," FO spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said and condemned the "horrifying and despicable" attack.

She said Pakistan's consul in Zahedan was en route to the hospital to assist the injured and was expected to arrive considerable distance and security challenges. The Pakistani diplomat was also scheduled to meet local authorities to demand decisive action against the perpetrators. After the news of their

deaths spread, the relatives of the victims protested in front of the assistant commissioner's office in Alipur and appealed to the government of Pakistan to ensure the return of the bodies of their loved ones to Muzaffargarh. Baloch said that efforts were underway to facilitate the prompt repatriation of the remains of those killed in the attack. "This cowardly attack does not diminish Pakistan's resolve to combat terrorism," she added

Iran Muddasir Tipu, expressed his shock over the killings, ensuring full support to the families of the bereaved. "We have called upon Iran for full cooperation in this matter," Tipu posted on X. The incident comes just a day before the Iranian foreign minister visits Islamabad, which is expected to include discus-

sions on border security and

the challenge of militant sanctuaries along the shared

This incident, which occurred within a week of the tit-for-tat strikes by Iran and Pakistan in each other's territories, is likely to add to the tension between the two

B'desh court grants bail to Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus

AP DHAKA

race in June.

appeals court in An appears court granted bail to Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, who had been sentenced earlier to six months in prison for violating the country's labour laws. The court also agreed to hear an appeal against his sentencing.

Yunus who pioneered the use of microcredit to help impoverished people, especially women, filed the appeal seeking bail on Sunday morning before it was granted. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in 2006. The 83-year-old economist and three other officials of the telecommunications company were sentenced to six months in prison on January 1, but they were immediately granted 30

days of bail to appeal the verdict and sentence. Sunday's court decision said the bail would remain effective until a final decision is made on the appeal for the sentencing. Defence lawyer Abdullah Al Mamun said the first hearing on the appeal would be held on March 3. The case involves Grameen Telecom, which Yunus founded as a nonprofit organisation. Yunus' supporters said the case is politically motivated, a charge that the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who was elected for a fourth consecutive term earlier this month, has denied.

In the original verdict, the judge said Yunus' company violated Bangladeshi labor laws. At least 67 Grameen Telecom workers were supposed to be made permanent employees but were

formed. The judge also said that according to company policy 5 per cent of Grameen's dividends were supposed to have been distributed to staff but were not. The judge found Yunus, the chairman of the company, and the three other company directors guilty, and fined each 30,000 takas, or USD 260, while also sentencing each to prison. Yunus said after the original verdict that he was innocent. "We are being punished for a crime we did not commit. It was my fate, the nation's fate. We have accepted this verdict, but will appeal this verdict and continue fighting against this sentence," he told reporters after the verdict was announced on

not, and a "welfare fund" to sup-

port the staff in cases of emer-

gency or special needs was never

Commonwealth observer group | PTI could be banned if Imran is convicted to visit Pak to assess elections

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

head of general elections Ain Pakistan on February 8, a 13-member Commonwealth observer group led by former Nigerian President Dr Goodluck Jonathan will be deployed to offer an independent and comprehensive assessment of the country's electoral process. The general elections in Pakistan will be held on February 8, and there are approximately 128 million eligible voters.

On election day, members of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) will observe and consider all aspects of the election process across Pakistan, from the opening of polling stations and the voting process to the Secretariat Media and Public counting of ballots and the Affairs division said.

announcement of results. The observer team, which has been selected by the Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland, comprises multi-disciplinary experts from across the Commonwealth nations and would be chaired by former Nigeria president Ionathan.

13-member Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) is due to arrive in Islamabad on February 1 and will remain in the country until the electoral process is completed. The observer group will offer an independent and comprehensive assessment of the electoral process," a statement from Commonwealth

Commenting on the visit of the delegation, the Secretary-General said: "The Commonwealth is pleased to support Pakistan's democratic journey. We look forward to peaceful and fair elections".

"I am grateful that former Nigeria president Dr Goodluck Jonathan has once again accepted our invitation to serve as chair of an election observer group. The team of observers will assess the conduct of the process as a whole and, where appropriate, make recommendations for the further strengthening of the electoral system," she added. Patricia said that she was hopeful that the recommendations would benefit the people and government of Pakistan in strengthening their electoral processes.

in cases pending against him: Reports

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Tailed Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party could be banned if its founder and former prime minister and other top brass are convicted in the cases relating to the May 9 violent incidents and violation of the Secrets Act in the cipher case, according to a media reports on Sunday. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) after several years of probing into the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party's funding unanimously declared that the party had received "prohibited funding" in August 2003.

This created an opportunity for the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to dis-

solve the party. Khan was however disqualified from Parliament, Geo News reported. The cipher case pertains to a piece of paper, purported to be a diplomatic cable — the cipher

- that Khan had waved at a public rally on March 27, 2022, and naming the US, had claimed that it was 'evidence' of an "international conspiracy" to topple his government.

On May 9, 2023, violent protests erupted after the arrest of Khan by paramilitary Rangers in Islamabad. Over 20 military installations and state buildings, including the army headquarters in Rawalpindi, were damaged or torched in the violent protests that followed Khan's arrest in a corruption case. The party ran into trouble after the May 9 violence by its

were arrested in the days after the attack and booked on various charges. Highly placed sources that had been part of the previous Shehbaz Sharif government told The News on Saturday that the ECP verdict had provided an occasion for the PDM government of the time to raise the question before the Supreme Court of Pakistan to declare the PTI a banned entity but the government opted to agitate the matter later at an appropriate time. Sources that had been part of the previous Shehbaz Sharif government on Saturday said the ECP verdict

had provided an occasion for

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to declare the PTI a banned

supporters. Hundreds of rioters entity but the government opted to agitate the matter later at an appropriate time.

Senator Azam Nazir Tarrar, the law and justice minister of the previous government and leader of the house in the Senate, said the government was struggling to save the country from default and opted to delay the matter. Tarrar said the PTI had defied several laws under the Elections Act of 2017, and committed offences which, once the government decided to agitate regarding the PTI's lawful existence, could be conveniently decided by the apex court. To a query, Tarrar said the caretaker government could also knock on the doors of the highest court for the purpose but the next government would have to consider it with seriousness

Climate change figures prominently in Pakistan political parties' manifestos

PTI ISLAMABAD

fter Pakistan was by cata-Astrophic floods in 2022, two major political parties in the country have prominently highlighted the importance of dealing with climate changerelated issues in their manifestos ahead of the February 8 general elections. Ranked as the 5th most vulnerable country to climate change according to the Global Climate Risk Index, a UN report has warned that Pakistan will experience increasingly severe extreme weather events.

The total damage from the devastating floods in 2022 that hit 33 million people in Pakistan is estimated at PKR 3.2 trillion (USD 14.9 billion), with a total loss of PKR 3.3 trillion (USD 15.2 billion). But not just annual, large-scale floods,

Pakistan has faced melting glaciers in the north triggering Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), record-breaking heat waves, droughts, forest fires in various regions and cyclones in the southern parts that have been exacerbated by the changing climate in recent years.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) with Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as its head, released their manifestos on Saturday and promised a multitude of things to their voters. One common thing in both was the emphasis on climate changerelated issues and the promise of many mitigation and adaptation measures. While the PML-N mentioned the measures under the section

'Building a Climate Resilient

Pakistan', the PPP had a separate chapter 'Green New Deal: Climate Resilient Futures' in its manifesto. The third prominent party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) headed by incarcerated Imran Khan, has not released any manifesto as yet, however, given its track record of implementing 'Billion Tree Tsunami' as part of the party's 'Green Growth Initiative,' it is known that climate change is part of their discourse.

Before it was replaced by a caretaker administration in August, Pakistan's outgoing government had approved a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) in July 2023. It sets out how Pakistan will deal with challenges brought by climate change. However, there are a whole lot of things that need to be done vis-à-vis climate change. Extreme events such as

the devastating floods of 2022, which directly and indirectly affected 33 million people, exposed Pakistan's vulnerabilities to the effects of climate change and weakness in the state's pre- and post-disaster planning, including the lack of proper early warning systems. Both PML-N and PPP parties have addressed these issues. "We must do everything to

ensure that we increase our climate resilience and protect our people and our land from the dangers of climate change, stated the PML-N manifesto. The PPP manifesto said,

"Our priority will be to not just adapt and shock-proof our people from the risks of extreme weather, but to educate and mitigate against the dangers of such global threats to build resilience against the existential threat of climate stress, environmental degradation, pollution and waste." The PML-N, which gave the example of its 2022-23 rule, that had designed and initiated the implementation of the 'Climate-Resilient Recovery and Reconstruction Framework', termed the 4RF, said, it will

Rehabilitation continue effective implementation of this Framework in the government and envisioning a 'Resilient Pakistan by 2029'. This commitment extends beyond immediate gains, ensuring a sustainable legacy for future generations," it said.

After listing its achievements in the environment and climate change section for its previous two terms, the PML-N manifesto mentions 'Promise 2024-2029' with 16 main pointers. The list starts with a promise for clean air with var-

ious steps to be taken for good air quality, including transboundary cooperation between India and Pakistan to reduce the impact of crop burning dependent on the direction of the wind; speaks of a 'Green Pakistan Programme' and banning plastics apart from proper waste management.

The document promises action for increasing forest cover; launching a 'National Adaptation Plan' to enhance the country's capacity for climate change adaptation and also mentions carrying out national environment conservation awareness-raising campaigns focusing on energy, water, solid waste management and air quality. It talks of developing and implementing a sector-based Carbon Credit Policy Framework for Pakistan; 4RF (Resilient, Rehabilitation,

Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework) to ensure transformative measures for sustainable climate resilience; incentivising climate-resilient agriculture investment and promises 'National and Provincial Action against Climate Change' including disaster risk management and reduction, urban planning climate, finance and climateresilient infrastructure.

On the other hand, the PPP manifesto spoke about bringing in policies that "will also aim to leverage renewable resources for cheap, clean energy to power the homes and schools and workplaces of the most vulnerable, protect our forests and wildlife, and to lower air and water pollution, as a priority for our cities and rural waterways while retaining our reform focus on gen-

der inclusion." The Green New Deal will include building Climate Resilient futures on the ground "by climate-proofing all investments and infrastructure and by ensuring all upcoming energy solutions are clean, people-friendly and generate jobs for local communities." The manifesto promised

that the investment in Pakistan's public sector infrastructure including roads, communication, health, irrigation and agriculture would all be made with a focus on climate resilience; green energy parks harnessing solar power would be set up; climate-smart agricultural practices along with crop insurance and also climate resilient health facilities. One important approach was to address climate change as a Human Rights Issue.

India gas demand to rise 6 per cent in 2024: IEA

ndia's natural gas demand is expected to rise by 6 per cent in 2024 with a rise in consumption in fertiliser units, power generation and industrial sectors, according to the International Energy Agency

Following the 7 per cent year-on-year decline observed in 2022, India's primary gas supply rose by 5 per cent in 2023, with growth primarily driven by the power petrochemical, refinery generation, industrial sectors.

"Natural gas demand in India is expected to increase by 6 per cent in 2024, mainly supported by higher gas use in industry (including in the fertiliser sector) and stronger gas burn in the

sector

pipeline grid and city gas infrastructure," IEA said Gas Market Report released last week. India's natural gas demand had risen to 64 billion cubic meters in 2023. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports rose by 7 per cent on the year to 29 billion cubic meters last year, with import dependency at 44 per cent of the natural nation's Domestic consumption.

the pioneer

production was up 6 per cent on the year to 35 billion cubic meters on the back of a rise in output from Reliance Industries' KG-D6 block.

"We expect India to increase its LNG imports in 2024 by 7 per cent, fuelled by demand from the power and fertiliser sectors, as the country plans to stop importing urea by 2025," IEA



Natural gas extracted from below surface and seabeds is used to make fertiliser, generate electricity, convert into CNG to run automobiles, piped to households for cooking purposes

and used as fuel and feedstock in industries.

India's domestic production is insufficient to meet demand and so the fuel is imported as LNG in cryogenic ships

Power companies imported 2.32 billion cubic meters of LNG in 2023, making up around 9 per cent of total imports and up by 76

cent of total imports and up by 76 per cent on the year.

In November 2023 India approved mandatory blending of compressed biogas into the domestic gas supply. The mandate will be set at 1 per cent of total compressed natural gas and domestic piped natural gas consumption from 2025, and raised gradually to 5 per cent raised gradually to 5 per cent from 2028-29.

On reforms, IEA said, "India continued to advance gas market reforms in 2023. The country introduced a unified pipeline tariff system on April 1, which could benefit consumers located far from domestic gas supply sources and/or LNG terminals. In addition to the market reforms, India is considering

establishing strategic gas reserve to enhance gas supply security".
The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) introduced the Unified Tariff (UFT) policy in April 2023 to create a single, consistent and fair tariff structure for natural gas transport across the country. The UFT policy will apply to a network of 21 pipelines, representing around 90 per cent of pipelines in operation or under construction. The price of transporting gas consists of two components - a fixed unified tariff based on the levelised cost of service of the entire pipeline network, and a variable zonal factor depending on distance.

"The UFT policy aims to create a more stable, competitive and transparent pricing regime, which should benefit both gas supply and demand.



Auto firms seek continued push to green mobility, infra development

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $T^{\text{he Government needs to continue}}_{\text{with favourable policies to promote}}$ green mobility while also focussing on infrastructure development at a robust pace in the upcoming Budget, according to some leading firms in the automobile space. The Union government is all set to present the interim Budget on February 1.

"We expect capex on infrastructural projects to continue, aiding the automotive sector. The policy push for green mobility should remain a key focus for the government, encouraging faster adoption of electric vehicles, Mercedes-Benz India MD and CEO Santosh Iyer said.

The luxury car industry has a significant value contribution to the GDP and the segment aspires for a rationalised duty structure and GST on priority, he added. "Overall, we expect consistency in various policies and no surprises in the upcoming budget," Iyer

Luxury vehicles currently attract the top GST slab of 28 per cent with an additional cess of 20 per cent on sedans and 22 per cent on SUVs, taking the total tax incidence to up to 50 per cent.
Toyota Kirloskar Motor Deputy
Managing Director (Corporate
Planning, Finance & Administration
and Manufacturing) Swapnesh R Maru said the automaker remains confident that the Government will continue its push towards shifting the economy and transportation sector to a greener future that is less dependent on fossil fuels. "Looking ahead, policy stability and continued emphasis on spurring investment and infrastructure development will not only further enhance the country's global competitiveness but also lead to growth

JK Tyre & Industries Chairman & Director Managing Singhania said that consistent automotive policies would propel

"A robust budget is vital for India's journey to become the third-largest global economy," he noted.

Mahindra Last Mile Mobility MD &

upliftment of many. "We call upon the Union Budget 2024



amid the

No disruption in oil flows to India, only freight up due to Red Sea crisis: HPCL

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $T^{\text{he ongoing attacks on}}_{\text{shipping vessels by}}$ Houthi militants in the Red Sea have not impacted the flow of crude oil to India but freight has gone up due to rerouting via the Cape of Good Hope, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) chairman Pushp Kumar Joshi said.

India, the world's thirdbiggest oil importer, gets a bulk of its Russian supplies through the Red Sea. Russian supplies made up for over 35 per cent of India's total crude imports in 2023, amounting to 1.7 million barrels per day.

Russian ships and cargoes are not being prime targets of the attacks at this stage however rerouting of ships around the southern tip of Africa instead of transiting through the Suez Canal and Red Sea has led to ships taking longer voyages,

ships and rise in freight

In a post-third quarter earnings call with investors, Joshi said HPCL has tied up crude oil supplies till mid-April and it does not see any supply disruptions.

HPCL meets 44-45 per cent of its crude oil needs on contracts with term national oil companies such as those in Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

The remaining is on the spot or from the current market, he said.

Term crude has not been impacted (due to the Red Sea crisis)," he said, adding the spot imports are on DES basis where the shipping is arranged by the supplier. "The spot supplies

too are not impacted."
HPCL, he said, has "already tied up crude requirements till fiscal year end (in March) and the first couple of weeks of April." "Crude oil supplies have not seen

FPIs take out ₹24,700 crore from equities emerging markets like In terms of sector, FPIs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $F_{(\text{FPIs})\ \text{have dumped}}^{\text{oreign Portfolio Investors}}$ Indian equities worth Rs 24,700 crore so far this month, owing to surging bond yield in the US. On the other hand, they are

bullish on the debt market and infused Rs 17,120 crore in the debt market during the period under review, data with the depositories showed.

According to the data, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) have pulled out Rs 24,734 crore from Indian equities this month (till January 25).

Before this, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 66,134 crore in the entire opting to book profits in the investment decisions with crore in October, data December and Rs 9,000 Indian equity markets as respect to investing in showed.

crore in November.

"The rising bond yields in the US is a matter of concern, and this has triggered the recent bout of selling in the cash market," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, "The rally in global stock

the Fed pivot which saw the 10-year bond yield falling from 5 per cent to around 3.8 per cent. 'Now the 10-year bond is back at 4.18 per cent, which indicates that the Fed rate

markets was triggered by

cut will come only in H2 of 2024," he added. FPIs started the new year with a cautious approach further cues, before taking



they touched all-time high levels.

Moreover, uncertainty over the interest rate scenario also prompted them to stay on the sidelines and wait for

Himanshu were sellers in auto & auto Srivastava, Associate ancillary, Director-Manager Research entertains at Morningstar Investment Research India, said. On a bullish stance in the

debt markets, experts said that the announcement by JP Morgan Chase & Co. In September last year that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024 influenced the inflow in the country's bond markets in the past few months.

FPIs made a net investment of Rs 18,302 crore in the debt market in December, 14,860 crore November, and Rs 6,381

entertainment marginally in IT, and they bought in oil and gas, power and selectively in financial services, Geojit's Vijayakumar said. Overall, the total FPI flows for 2023 stood at Rs 1.71

lakh crore in equities and Rs 68,663 crore in the debt market. Together, they infused Rs 2.4 lakh crore into the capital market. The flow in Indian equities

came following a worst net outflow of Rs 1.21 lakh crore in 2022 on aggressive rate hikes by the central banks globally. Before the outflow, FPIs invested money in the last three

Bansal quits Flipkart board

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-commerce major Flipkart co-founder Binny Bansal has resigned from the company's board, according to a company statement.

The development comes after around six months of Bansal selling an entire stake in the company.
"I am proud of the Flipkart

Group's achievements over the past 16 years. Flipkart is in a robust position, with a strong leadership team and a clear path forward, and

decided to step aside, knowing the company is in capable hands. I wish the team the best as they continue to transform experiences for customers, and I remain a strong supporter of the business," Bansal said.

He co-founded the efirm with commerce Sachin Bansal in 2007. Sachin Bansal stepped down from the Flipkart board in 2018 after Walmart acquired a 77 per cent stake in the company at a valuation of USD 21



Besides being an active investor, Binny angel Bansal has also started his own firm to provide sellers on e-commerce platforms. His insights and deep

expertise in the business have been invaluable to the Board and company. Flipkart is the outcome of a great idea and a lot of hard work, built by teams committed

transforming how India shops. We wish Binny the best as he embarks on his next venture and thank him for the deep impact he has enabled for the Indian retail ecosystem. Flipkart CEO and board

The valuation of Flipkart has increased to around USD 38 billion. The firm, however, still continues to run in losses.

Krishnamurthy said.

The company posted a 9.4 per cent increase in consolidated net total income to Rs 56,012.8 crore in financial year 2023 against Rs 51,176 crore in FY 2022.

Despite a rise in the total Flipkart's income, Flipkart's consolidated loss widened to Rs 4,890.6 crore in FY23 from Rs 3,371.2 crore a year

of the manufacturing and service sector," he added. Raghupati

sectoral expansion.

CEO Suman Mishra said that by driving inclusive income generation, electric three-wheelers and commercial vehicles pave the way for financial

to prioritise this segment through continued FAME support, fostering economic empowerment for the most deserving and environmental well-

CNH plans to invest up to USD 50 million in India

Ttalian-American off-road **L** construction and agriculture firm CNH is planning to invest up to USD 50 million in the farm machinery segment in India this year and launch a 105HP tractor in May, according to a top CNH India official. CNH, which produces and sells farm machinery and equipment under the New Holland brand, will focus on the compact range of tractors of below 30-40 horsepower (HP), besides targeting to sell 1,000 baler machines (used for managing stubble) this

Currently, CNH India has a four per cent market share in the tractor business in India and has a considerable presence in the 45-50 HP range of tractors.

Speaking to PTI, CNH India SAARC Country Managing Manager and Managing Director Narinder Mittal said there is a huge potential in India's agriculture sector, and the company intends to double its market share to 8 per cent in the next four We plan to invest about USD

40-50 million in the current



the calendar year in agriculture segment, including the programme investment," he added. Out of which, USD 25-30

Builders are constructing bigger homes to meet con-

sumers' demand as the average size of flats rose 11 per

cent last year across seven

major cities, according to

Real estate consultant

Anarock has analysed the

fresh supply of housing units

during 2023 across the

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Anarock.

tractor business alone, he noted.

million will be invested in the

Under the programme investment, Mittal said the company is working on a specific tractor model of above 45 HP with a new engine for higher fuel efficiency.

The cash flow for this will begin this year and the new model is likely to be launched by the end of 2025, he added. On a product launch, Mittal said a bigger tractor of 105 HP is lined up for the launch in May this year. This tractor is used for bailing and ridge application.

At present, the company is importing bigger tractors of more than 100 HP to meet the growing demand for baler

Average flat size expands 11 per cent in top 7 cities

and ridge machines in the country, he said. Stating that balers help in

managing stubble, Mittal said there is a growing awareness about the use of such machines in the country, and consequently, the company's sales of balers have gone up significantly in 2023

CNH India sold about 840 small square balers in 2023 against 450 in the previous year. The company also sold 50 big and round balers in 2023, the company official "We expect that we said. should be touching 1,000 balers this year," he said,

enduring 'new normal' in homebuyer preferences, this

demand seems eminently sustainable," Puri said.

Krisumi Corporation MD

Mohit Jain said the aspirational segment of

society is playing a pivotal role in propelling the demand for premium homes, which are spacious

"This trend may continue in the foreseeable future," he

Among seven major cities,

Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and Kolkata

were the only two cities

where the average flat sizes

and bigger in size.

adding the company is selling balers in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and parts of Madhya Pradesh.

Balers compress agricultural residue into manageable and transportable bales. Small square balers that cost around RS 11-12 lakh per unit can be used with existing tractors, while the big/round balers that cost around Rs 2 crore per set require above 100HP tractors for operation.

The company manufactures small balers in Pune but imports some components that it intends to localise by the middle of this year.

431 infra projects show cost overrun of ₹4.82L crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

s many as 431 infrastruc-A ture projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, were hit by cost overrun of more than Rs 4.82 lakh crore in December 2023, an official report stated.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), which monitors infrastructure projects worth Rs 150 crore and above, out

of 1,820 projects, 431 reported cost overrun and 848 projects were delayed. "Total original cost of implementation of the 1,820 projects was Rs 25,87,066.08 crore and their anticipated core and their anticipated completion cost is likely to be Rs 30,69,595.88 crore, which reflects overall cost overruns of Rs 4,82,529.80 crore (18.65 per cent of original cost)," the ministry's latest report for December 2023 said. According to the report, the expenditure incurred on these projects till December 2023 is Rs 16.26.813.80 crore, which is

cost of the projects. However, it stated that the number of delayed projects decreased to 638, if delay is calculated on the basis of the schedule

16,26,813.80 crore, which is

53 per cent of the anticipated

delayed projects, 202 have overall delays in the range of 1-12 months, 200 have been delayed for 13-24 months, 323 projects for 25-60 months, and 123 projects have been delayed for more than 60 months.

Rana Talwar, first Indian to head a global bank, dies PTI NEW DELHI

Veteran banker Rana Talwar, who was the first Indian to head a global bank -- Standard Chartered Plc, died at the age of 76 years.

Talwar, son-in-law of DLF Group chairman emeritus K P Singh, breathed his last on Saturday, sources said. He is survived by his wife Renuka and son Rahul.

Besides DLF, he served on the boards of various companies including Asahi India Glass Limited and Great Eastern Energy Corporation Limited. The company regrets to inform about the sad demise of Talwar, a non-executive director, on Saturday, January 27, 2024, which was intimated to the company by the family members, DLF said in a

regulatory filing. Born in 1948, Talwar started his career as a banker in India with Citi Bank after passing out of the prestigious St Stephens College, Delhi. During his stint at Citi Bank, Gurvirendra Singh Talwar also known as Rana Talwar, was responsible for building the US-based bank's retail businesses across Asia Pacific and the Middle East.

He was subsequently responsible for all of Citibank's retail businesses across Europe and the United States. He was a member of the Citibank/ Citigroup Policy and Operating Committees. Talwar left Citibank in 1996 to join Standard Chartered Plc as Global Chief Executive. He was the first Asian to become the Chief Executive of an FTSE 25 company and of a major global bank.He was

responsible for repositioning Standard Chartered Plc as a

leading emerging markets

acquisition of Grindlays Bank

from ANZ Bank.

including

primary residential market of seven major cities. The data showed that average flat sizes in the top 7 cities rose to 1,300 square feet last year from 1,175 square feet in 2022. In the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) and Kolkata,

the average size of apartments fell, but it grew in Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune Chennai in 2023. The average size stood at 1,050 square feet in 2019,

1,167 sq ft in 2020, and 1,170

sq ft in 2021.



in the top cities have in no way dispelled the demand for generous living spaces,' Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri said The supply of bigger luxury

homes

said, adding that around 23 per cent of the total new category.

homes was kick-started by the pandemic, but there are increased no signs of it waning three significantly last year, he years later. Led by an 37 per cent rise in average

launches were in the luxury "The demand for bigger-size

In MMR, the average flat size fell 5 per cent to 794 sq ft in 2023 from 840 square feet in

decreased in 2023.

In Kolkata, the average flat size saw a 2 per cent decline to 1,124 sq ft last year from 1,150 square feet in 2022. Delhi-NCR saw the highest

flat size to 1,890 square feet in 2023 from 1,375 sq ft in Anarock said that developers

in the Delhi-NCR are actively tracking demand and launching larger homes. The demand is skewed significantly towards luxury apartments, which primarily defined by bigger

Hyderabad has the highest average flat size at 2,300 square feet, up 30 per cent from 1,775 square feet in In Bengaluru, the average

flat size increased by 26 per cent to 1,484 sq ft in 2023 from 1,175 sq ft in the previous year. The average flat size in Pune

saw an 11 per cent increase to 1,086 sq ft in 2023 from 980 sq ft in 2022. Chennai saw a 5 per cent rise in average flat sizes to 1,260 square feet in 2023 from

year, Anarock said.

completion. Out of the 848

1,200 sq ft in the previous

Hseih, Elise win Australian Open women doubles

Hseih Su-wei of Taiwan has become the second-oldest woman to win a Grand Slam doubles title after teaming with Elise Mertens of Belgium on Sunday to win the Australian Open women's doubles.

The second-seeded pairing of Hseih and Mertens beat 11th seeded Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia and Lyudmyla Kichenok of Ukraine 6-1 7-5 in Sunday's final. It was Hseih's seventh Grand Slam women's doubles title and Mertens' fourth, their second together. Hsieh follows Rohan Bopanna of India who became the oldest men's champion when he won

the men's doubles title Saturday with Matthew Ebden

the pioneer

American Lisa Raymond was eight days older than Hseih when she won the 2011 US Open women's doubles. Martina Navratilova was 49

coached by Australian Paul McNamee who won six Grand Slam doubles titles, including two Australian Opens and was the Australian Open chief executive until 2006. She already had taken out the mixed doubles at the current tournament with Jan Zielinski



Mertens won the Wimbledon title with Hseih in 2021 and won the Australian Open title the same year with Aryna Sabalenka, who won her second straight singles title in Melbourne on Saturday. She also won the U.S. Open women's doubles in 2019. Mertens will return to the No.

1 WTA doubles ranking on Monday, a position she first held in May, 2021. She has spent 28 weeks in the top ranking spot. Hseih and Mertens needed

only 1 hour, 33 minutes on Rod Laver Arena on Sunday to pad their already impressive

took the first set in just over half and hour. The second set was much tighter as Mertens lost her serve in the opening game. She recovered to serve for the championship at 5-3 but was broken again.

Finally, Hseih and Mertens took the match when they broke Kichenok in the 12th game. Mertens leapt into the air in delight; Hseih was more reserved.

They make a formidable combination, Mertens with the stronger serve, Hseih with skillful touches around the net and flat, strong groundstrokes

"It was a tough final," Mertens said. "The second set was

great match for us and we had to stay focused all the time." Ostapenko and Kichenok faced a tough road to the final, beating the US Open champions Gabriela champions Dabrowski and Erin Routliffe

7-5 7-5 in the semifinals.
They lacked communication and teamwork in the first set but worked better together in the second in which Ostapenko's serve was dependable. Kichenok lost her serve in the fourth, eight and final games.

ended Kichenok comments at the presentation ceremony with the words Slava Ukraini, Glory to Ukraine'.



Pavon is first Frenchman to win on PGA Tour since **World War II**

alternate event, while representing the United

States. He later switched his nationality to France.

Pavon took the lead on the

12th hole, built the advantage to two strokes

and then missed a 3-foot

putt on the par-4 17th for a

bogey that cut his lead to

His only birdie on the back

nine saved him from a

He' appeared to be in

trouble on the par-5, 541-

vard 18th when his drive

landed in a sand trap, about

4 inches from the front lip. His second shot went 103

vards into the left rough.

which was high because of

heavy rain Monday, with 145 yards to the hole. He

responded with a brilliant third shot within 8

After watching Hojgaard's

300-yard drive down the

middle of the fairway, "I

was like, OK, it's going to be

spicy now. I might have to do a birdie or something

After ending up in the trap

and then not getting back to

the fairway, he and

whether he should lay up or

was like, Listen, like the

lie doesn't look too bad, I

feel like I can do it.' He said

"It's my call. And I was so

pumped at that time, I

know I had the energy to

lift that ball up on the green. I kind of aimed to

the middle of the green

knowing the face would

close a little bit because it's

quite deep and thick. That

ball came out like a butterfly and it really feed

the slope on the green. That

was the right time to prove I

have the guts to finish that

tournament and I did it so

I'm so happy about that last

'OK, but it's your call.'

discussed

special," Pavon said.

Sherwood

go for it.

one stroke.

playoff.

AP ■ SAN DIEGO

Matthieu Pavon became the first player to win a PGA Tour event under the French flag since World War II when he made an 8-foot putt on No. 18 at Torrey Pines South on Saturday for a dramatic birdie and a oneshot victory in the Farmers Insurance Open.

He raised his arms in celebration and shouted before hugging caddie Mark Sherwood after the putt rolled in as the municipal gem high above the Pacific Ocean glowed under the late-afternoon

Pavon glowed, too. He said he almost quit golf 10 years ago because of the yips. "It is big for our country,"

rookie said. "I hope it will inspire a lot of people, because coming from an amateur player

which is 800 in the world to a PGA Tour winner is pretty big.
"I still can't believe it," said

Pavon, who grew up playing soccer - his dad was a professional player before switching to golf. "It feels like there is another

round to play tomorrow because we're Saturday."
The Farmers

ended Saturday to avoid going up against conference championship

final-round 3 Pavon's under 69 put him at 13 under, one stroke better than Nicolai Hojgaard. Pavon was two shots ahead of Stephan Jaeger, who led after the second and third rounds, and Nicolai Hojgaard and Nate Lashley. French-American Martin Trainer won his first PGA Tour event at the 2019 Puerto Rico Open, an

when she won the mixed doubles at the 2006 U.S. Open with Bob Bryan.

Hseih has the benefit of being



A six-day international kayaking tournament will be organised next month near India's border with China in Arunachal Pradesh on the fastflowing Tawangchu river, in which two rivers from Tibet converge before it flows through Tibet to finally reach the Brahmaputra.
Beginning February 5, the
Tides'

will tournament see participants experience heartpounding thrills as they navigate the river's Class V rapids, according to a statement issued by the

organisers.

The event is being organised under the patronage of at an altitude of above 10,000



Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Union minister Kiren Rijiju, who also belongs to the state, the organisers said, adding that the tournament will start from Lumla, near Tawang. Tawangchu is the main river

with China. Arunachal Pradesh shares a 1,129-kmlong LAC with the Tibet Autonomous Region. As many as 130 kayakers from

across the world are expected to join the event, the statement said, adding, "It's not just a sport; it's a wild, unforgettable journey where

waters of Arunachal Pradesh." The event will be witness to the kayakers' incredible skills and precision as they navigate a course filled with gates and obstacles. The race is a single lap of the course, according to the organisers. "Experience the camaraderie of a global community,

sharing a common love for adventure and conquering the Tawangchu river's thrilling rapids together," the statement It said there will be nine

competition categories, catering to every kayaking skill and style.

The entire Tawang district is known as the basin of the

rivers from Tibet 'Tsona Chu and 'Nyamjang Chu' join the Tawangchu in the district. The combined river then flows west into Bhutan, from where it enters Assam as river Manas and later, merges with the Brahmaputra river.

organisers participants will be provided top-class accommodations equipped with electricity supply, warm food and hygienic toilets.

Tawang is also a historic and picturesque town, known for its stunning landscapes and its spiritual heritage. His Holiness the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso was born here. The town is also home to one of Asia's oldest

As the Netherlands continued

to put pressure on the Indian

defence, Janneke van de

Venne capitalised on an

opening and scored to end the first half 6-0 in the Netherlands' favour.



AP BRADENTON (US)

Hometown favourite Kelly Korda shot a 3-under 68 with an eagle-birdie finish Saturday to take a three-shot lead into the final round of the LPGA Drive On

Championship

Championship.
Trying to complete a wire-towire victory at Bradenton
Country Club, Korda Country Club, Korda rebounded with the late flurry after making consecutive bogeys on Nos. 7 and 8 in 10-15 mph wind with the temperature in the upper 70s. "I'm actually kind of taken back with how much support I've been getting this week,"

"Being in Florida I always get a lot of support, but hometown, it's crazy. I was born just in the hospital just down the road from here. It's been nice seeing friends and family come out ... Feeling the

Korda said.

support."

The eight-time LPGA Tour winner was 13 under.

"It's a confidence boost knowing I can climb up the leaderboard and contend and stay in contention," Korda

great start today.

Coming off a victory in the Tournament of Champions, Lydia Ko was tied for second after a 69. Megan Khang (66) and Ayaka Furue (69) also were 9 under.

a victory short of entering the LPGA Hall of Fame.

Tawangchu. Two fast-flowing **Hockey5s Women World Cup**

India lose to Netherlands, finish runners up

India lost 2-7 to the Netherlands in the final to finish runners-up at the FIH Hockey5s Women's World Cup here. Jyoti Chhatri (20th minute)

and Rutuja Dadaso Pisal (23rd) scored for India in the summit clash on Saturday. Janneke van de Venne (2nd, 14th), Bente van der Veldt (4th, 8th) and Lana Kalse (11th, 27th) struck a brace each for the Netherlands, while Sosha Benninga (13th)

was the other goal-getter. their exemplary performance in the FIH Hockey5s Women's World Cup, Hockey India has announced a cash award of Rs 3 lakh for each player and Rs 1.5 lakh each for the support staff. Both the teams probed for their chances after the



start and it wasn't long before the Netherlands found an opening.

Janneke van de Venne took a long-range shot which deflected off the Indian goalkeeper Rajani Etimarpu into the goal to hand Netherlands the lead. Moments later, Bente van der

Veldt found herself open in front of the Indian goal and smashed the ball into the net to double the lead.

period of Netherlands dominance followed. Bente make it 4-0 in Netherlands' van der Veldt remained alert in front of the Indian goal as her quick overhead shot sailed past the Indian defence

into the goal.

With four minutes to go in the first-half, Lana Kalse pounced on a loose ball and unleashed a powerful shot to favour. Soon after, Sosha Benninga used a deft touch to bypass Rajani in goal and further extended their lead.

The Dutch dominance continued in the second-half, resulting in a challenge which was saved by Rajani. India opened their account five minutes into the secondhalf as Jyoti found some space

and struck a shot from distance to beat Netherlands' Rutuja then received the ball under pressure, turned on a sixpence and breached Netherlands' goal to make it 6-2. As India started to pile on the pressure, a quick counter-attack goal from Netherlands' Lana Kalse their five-goal restored cushion.

"It was really windy," said Ko,

Xavi will not continue at Barcelona after this season

AP BARCELONA

Xavi Hernández won't continue as Barcelona's coach after this season, saying he can't get the team out of a slump. Xavi announced his decision on Saturday, minutes after Barcelona lost to Villarreal 5-3 in the Spanish league, leaving it 10 points adrift of leader Real Madrid. "I would like to announce that on June 30 I will cease being the coach of Barça," Xavi said.

course and of dynamics." Xavi said he made the decision "several days ago," and although the hard defeat to Villarreal set the scene for him to announce the decision, he "would have made" it soon enough. He said he hoped this decision will decrease the stress and tension his team is enduring.

coach of Barcelona is cruel, it is unpleasant, you feel like you don't get the respect you deserve," Xavi said. "As a Barcelona fan, I can't "It wears you down, affects

"The feeling of being the

allow this situation to your mental health, your continue, we need a change of emotions, up to the point that

Barcelona loses thriller with Villarreal



you say you can't go on. My loved ones know that." Xavi returned to Barcelona as the coach in November 2021 with his only experience a stint in Qatar. He has a contract through the end of

next season. The 44-year-old Xavi led Barcelona to the Spanish Super Cup title and the Spanish league title last season, the club's first trophies since the exit of Lionel Messi. The club mortgaged its future to help mortgaged its future to help him do that by signing players like Robert Lewandowski. But Barcelona has struggled

this season and has shown severe signs of suffering a collapse this month.

Barcelona saw its best two chances of getting a title in this campaign evaporate recently. Xavi's side exited the Copa del Rey quarterfinals after losing in extra time at Athletic Bilbao 4-2 on Wednesday, a loss that came two weeks after Barcelona was dismantled by Real Madrid in the Spanish Super

After the Villarreal debacle Xavi said his players' lacked the "maturity" to know how to hold onto leads, and after the Bilbao loss he also underscored that he was playing with several young players. But that seemed at odds with the fact that his starting side was led with veterans like Lewandowski, Ilkay Gundogan and players in their prime like Pedri González and Frenkie de

Barcelona is set to play Napoli in the Champions League round of 16 next month. Xavi said he was still motivated to lead the team at what is no doubt a long-shot bid at ending his stint with a European Cup.

AP BARCELONA

Barcelona again showed it is championshipcaliber team when it conceded twice in stoppage time to lose a 5-3 thriller with Villarreal in front of its stunned fans.

In one of the wildest games of the season on Saturday, Villarreal was up 2-0 then Barcelona roared back with three goals in a 12-minute span to lead 3-2 in the 72nd minute. But Barcelona's defense again let it down and new Villarreal arrival Goncalo Guedes leveled on a counterattack in the 84th. Striker Alexander Sorloth, who also set up two goals, then found the winner in stoppage time and José Morales added to Barcelona's misery.

Barcelona was trying to bounce back in La Liga from

its elimination from the Copa del Rey at Athletic Bilbao this week. Instead, its loss to an erratic Villarreal only added more pressure on beleaguered manager Xavi Hernandez to turn things around.

Real Madrid rallied to win at Las Palmas 2-1 without top scorer Jude Bellingham and reclaim the league lead. It opened up a 10-point gap over Barcelona in third.

"This is a huge blow," Xavi said. "We lost this game because of our mistakes. Today is difficult to digest for me as a coach but also for my players, who are all feeling

really bad. "We' did the hardest part



which was to turn it around, and we even had more chances to score, but that was when our problems started. We are paying a heavy price for our mistakes this season?

WHERE'S THE DEFENSE? Gerard Moreno opened the scoring near halftime from a pass by Sorloth. Former Barcelona youth player Ilias Akhomach took full advantage of horrible control by João Cancelo, who came on at halftime, to double the

advantage.
Ilkay Gundogan pulled one back for Barcelona in the 60th. Substitute Pedri González took a second before an own goal by Eric Baily put the hosts

Barcelona then looked close to sealing it with a fourth goal before Sorloth launched Guedes on the flank to beat goalkeeper Iñaki Peña from an angle to make it 3-3. The Norway striker put Villarreal back in front after Barcelona failed to clear the ball from its area. "If you are losing 0-2 and then go up 3-2 you cannot give it away and lose like that," Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong said.

This cannot happen to an elite team." Cancelo, like De Jong, backed Xavi and tried to take the

blame as players. "It truly was a disaster,"

Cancelo said. 'Those were the worst 45

minutes of my career." Barcelona's defense, which is missing injured goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen is falling apart in January.

Barcelona was crushed by Madrid 4-1 in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia two weeks ago, and on Wednesday it conceded twice in extra time

to lose at Bilbao 4-2. **MADRID RALLIES** Vinícius Júnior and Aurélien

Tchouaméni scored second-half goals for Madrid in the Canary Islands. After a first half stalemate

between the league's top defenses, midfielder Javi Muñoz put Las Palmas ahead in the 53rd from a pass by Sandro Ramírez. "We played a good first half against a great rival," Muñoz said.

Hartley hurts India on debut England record memorable 28 runs win in 1st Test

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The pushback started by incandescent Ollie Pope as given its perfect conclusion by debutant left-arm spinner Tom Hartley whose soulripping spell fashioned England's memorable 28-run win over India on the fourth day of the first Test here on Sunday

Sunday.
India's chase of 231 went horribly south once Hartley (7/62) spun into India's toporder, igniting a rot that saw India getting bowled out for 202 in the final over of the day. England now lead the five-match series 1-0. This is India's fourth defeat in

home Tests since 2013 and first ever in Hyderabad (across two venues in the

India's approach during chase was in complete contrast to tackled Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja with a lot of intent. The spin twins have

never been lethal on surfaces which aren't exactly dustbowl and England's second innings batting show won't do their

batting show won't do their reputation any good.
"With a lead of 190 we were in control but exceptional batting - probably one of the best I've seen in Indian conditions, well played Ollie Pope. I thought 230 was gettable but it wasn't to be." India skipper Rohit Sharma said after the match.
Rohit's opposite number Ben

Rohit's opposite number Ben Stokes termed it as his team's greatest win.

"Since I've taken the captaincy on, where we are and who we're playing against, it's 100% our greatest victory," Stokes said.

Earlier, Pope's brilliant 196 took England to 420 in their second innings, and gave them a substantial lead and genuine hopes of stretching India. And England did way more than stretching the

In fact, this defeat will leave a



deep burn in Indian hearts as they stumbled against a 25-year-old rookie Lancastrian with a combined experience of three international matches on a pitch that did not hide any demons.

not hide any demons.
There was appreciable turn and variable bounce but nothing this set of Indian batters could not have negated. Three dismissals showcased the travails of Indians on the day - Shubman Gill (0), Yashasvi Jaiswal (15) and Shreyas Iyer (13) fell to their own ineptitudes. Jaiswal made a half-hearted charge against Hartley and the spinner pulled back his length after spotting movement of the batter. All the left-hander could manage was to spoon a catch to Pope at silly point.

at silly point.
Gill followed the suit two

balls later in the same over. He made a hard-handed, indecisive push at the ball after Hartley tossed one around the off-stump. Pope

did the rest at silly point. Jack Leach, who is still not 100 per cent after taking a blow on his knee while fielding, dealt another telling

fielding, dealt another telling blow to India's aspirations.
He produced a rather regulation ball that went across the right-hander from around the stumps, and Shreyas just poked the ball to Joe Root at first slip. It was just a nothing dismissal that encapsulated India's turmoil on the day.

India could have felt a greater

on the day. India could have felt a greater pinch with Iyer's dismissal as he is one of the betterequipped batter in this batting unit to negate spin. In-form KL Rahul (22) looked all set for another impact innings, but Root pinned him on the back-foot as the batter attempted as as the batter attempted a whip on the on-side.

Rahul went upstairs after the on-field umpire gave him leg before, but the TV umpire too concurred with his distant colleague's decision.

Ashwin, Jadeja struggle on track that is not exactly dust bowl

 $R^{\mathrm{avichandran}}$ Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja are India's stormtroopers at home, tossing over opponents like pioneer dolls and their numbers validate their

They started the Hyderabad Test against England with a combined tally of 500 wickets, one behind Anil Kumble and Harbhajan

Now, they stand on top of the Indian chart with 511 wickets and certainly in the company of all-timers such company of all-timers such as Broad-Anderson (1039), Warne-McGrath (1001), Murali-Vaas (895) or Ambrose-Walsh (762). Despite that lofty achievement and a fairly decent haul, Ashwin and Jadeja might not look back at the first Test against

at the first Test against England with whole lot of fondness after visitors scored 420 in second innings at four plus runs per haul (6/156) in the first innings had played a significant part in India bundling out England for 246. Hence, it was natural for one to expect Ash-Jaddu to knock the stuffing out of England in their second innings, particularly after having established a huge

190-run lead. At least, that's the set pattern over the better part of the last decade in home Tests. But there was a turn in the script here at the RGI Stadium.

England batters under Ollie Pope tightened their swash



in the second innings with a barrage of sweeps and reverse sweeps from the stump line to keep the Indian duo frustrated for an extended period.

There were glimpses of their magic such as Jadeja uprooting Jonny Bairstow's stumps with a straight one or Ashwin castling Ben Stokes with a sharply spun delivery.

But once Pope and England found their fight, the Indians forgot their own on a pitch that offered turn the wasn't crumbling minefield from Rajkot a couple of years back.

In fact, head coach Rahul Dravid had offered a subtle caution. "It (The pitch) looks good one from what I've seen. It may spin a little bit. But how quickly and how fast, I am not sure, Dravid had said in a media interaction a few days back here. It panned out precisely that way as both Ashwin and Jadeja struggled to make an impact. Once Pope and even tailenders took the attack to them, they seemed

a bit flustered.

Fully fit Chahar sets sights on T20 World Cup

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A challenging phase on personal front behind him, which sidelined him for a few assignments, India seamer Deepak Chahar is ready for a comeback and has set his sights on the T20 World Cup to be jointly hosted by the United States and West Indies later this

year.
Chahar had to miss India's tour of South Africa in December followed by the home T20Is against Afghanistan after his father suffered a brain stroke, from which he has recovered now. "For me, my father comes first. I am here only because of him. Whatever I have achieved is because of my father. If I am not there for him in those situations, then obviously, what kind of son I am?," Chahar told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"If the series was in India, then I would have surely tried to play. You can come to the hospital if you need within 4to come back.

'It was an easy decision to be with my father -- any son would do that," he added. Chahar said while he did not get a lot of time to train apart from doing fitness-related work, he went to the NCA to work on his readiness as he eyes a spot in India's T20

World Cup squad. "I was with my father in the hospital for 25 days. He was not in Agra. He was admitted in Aligarh. We all had to stay

there," he said. "I was only able to do some exercises. I was not able to do



the Afghanistan series. I had not practised for a month or Mahi bhai should play for

so. another 2-3 years
"After that I went to the NCA. For someone who shares a Everything is good. I trained really hard for the IPL and the World Cup," he added.

Chahar said there is extra motivation for him to push for his case for selection, given that he has missed the last two T20 World Cups due to injuries.

"I have missed two (T20) World Cups because of my injuries. If I was fully fit, I would have been a part of the World Cup team as well. In any scenario or (in) any team combination, there is always a requirement for a bowler who can bat at No. 7, 8, 9. I have any cricketing activities, done that and scored runs for been lucky to learn so much 2011-12 seasons.

That's why I was not ready for the Indian team," he said.

5 hours. But obviously, (from) I started my practice again special bond with Mahendra South Africa it takes 2-3 days and now I am fully fit. Singh Dhoni, Chahar said he credits the CSK captain for harnessing his career and giving it longevity, but does impending retirement to hit the side anytime soon.

"It took me 2-3 years to get comfortable around him (Dhoni). I see him as an elder brother and I think he treats me as a younger brother," he

"We have our fun moments. During lockdown, we played a lot of PUBG together. We played a lot of games together. We spent a lot of time together off the field. I've

from him," Chahar said.
"I would say because of him

only I got a chance to play for India because before that, he gave me a really big chance to play all the 14 games in IPL. In 2018, I played all the 14

games."
Chahar said Dhoni, who has been struggling with a knee injury for the last one year or so, should stop taking additional responsibility in the CSK set-up at this stage of his career and must look to enjoy his game. enjoy his game. "I personally think he has a lot to give to cricket. He can

play for another 2-3 seasons. I have seen him bat in the nets. Obviously, he had an injury that anyone can have, people at 24 have that same injury that he has. "He has recovered well. For

me personally, he should play for another 2-3 years. (But) it's his call. He told everyone he is going to play his last game in Chennai. I think he will only decide B. will only decide. For us, it will be very difficult to play for CSK without him. Everyone seen Mahi bhai," Chahar said. "He should not be taking it at

this time because it is the end want the legend's of his career. He should be enjoying not taking responsibility and pressure for the team. He has prepared so many cricketers like Ravindra Jadeja and other players, those who can do that job, they are good at it," Chahar added.

> Chahar said players thrive when the environment is good in the team, citing similarity between Ranji Trophy-winning side Rajasthan in 2010-11 and

Himanshu four wickets put Delhi on cusp of improbable win

PTI ■ MOHALI

Stung by scathing criticism, skipper Himmat Singh pulled a beleaguered Delhi from the dungeons with a counter-attacking 194 before Himanshu Chauhan's four-Himanshu Chauhan's four-wicket burst put them on cusp of an improbable victo-ry over Uttarakhand in the Ranji Trophy here on Sunday. Having scored 264 for nine in their second innings, Delhi had Uttarakhand on the mat at 95 for six, chasing a target of 173. Uttarakhand need to score 77 on the final day with four wickets in hand.

After being bowled out for 147 in the first innings and then conceding a first-innings lead of 92, Delhi were left stuttering at 11 for five in their second innings five in their second innings with five of the top six back in the pavilion without troubling the scorers.

among the top two batters in the Delhi set-up, took it upon himself, adding 182 for the sixth wicket with keeperbatter Lakshy Thareja (43, 125), who played the second fiddle to perfection. Himmat, who was batting on

109 after the second day's play, hit 27 fours and a six, with a lot of shots coming square of the wicket on the off-side. After Thareja was dismissed,

Himmat also added another 30 runs with Hiamnshu (16), who was lethal with the new ball once again. Chasing a target of 173, it

was off-spinner Hrithik Shokeen, who got opener Avneesh Sudha caught by close-in fielder Arpit Rana before Himanshu removed Kunal Chandela (0), Yuvraj Choudhary (0) and Jiwanjot Singh (3) in quick succession.

Uttarakhand were reduced to 15 for 4 before Swapnil Singh (36) and veteran Aditya Tare (36) added 78 for the fifth wicket before Shokeen and Himanshu removed both by end of

third day's play to put Delhi in driver's seat.
Brief Scores: Delhi 147 and 264/9 d (Himmat Singh 194, Lakshy Thareja 43).
Uttarakhand 239 and (target 173) 95/6 (Aditive Tare 36 173) 95/6 (Aditya Tare 36, Himanshu Chauhan 4/19). Sandeep scores 150 as Odisha set 388-run target

for HP Opener Sandeep Pattanaik

scored 150 while Anurag contribute Odisha scored 425 for eight in their second innings to set a target of 388 for Himachal Pradesh in another Group D game in Cuttack.

At stumps, HP were 33 for one with 355 runs required on the final day for outright win. HP, however, will want to ensure three points as they had a slender first-innings lead of 38. Odisha scored 138 in first innings while HP scored 176.

Brief Scores: Odisha 138 and 425/8 (Sandeep Pattanaik 150, Rishi Dhawan 3/82). HP 176 and (target 388)

Joseph 7-68 inspires West Indies to a stunning 8 run win over Australia

AP ■ BRISBANE (AUSTRALIA)

Shamar Joseph braved a toe injury and grabbed 7-68 as the young fast bowler inspired the West Indies to its first win in Australia in 27 years in a gripping conclusion to the day-night test at the Gabba on Sunday.

Joseph, who hobbled off the field late Saturday evening when he was struck by a searing Mitchell Starc yorker from the final ball of West Indies' second innings, flattened Australia for 207 to give the West Indies a memorable win by eight runs. Opening batter Steve Smith was left stranded with an unbeaten 91 off 146 balls as Joseph kept coming hard at the Australian batters with his

Shout out for my teammates for their support," Joseph told

broadcasters masterminding West Indies' memorable win. "I wasn't even going to come to the ground today, but the doctor did something to my toe. I don't know what he did, but it worked."

The 24-year-old Joseph, who made his test debut at Adelaide where the West Indies lost by 10 wickets inside three days, sprinted towards boundary in joy as he clean bowled No. 11 Josh Hazlewood and leveled the two-match series 1-1.

"I just stuck to the basics," Joseph said. "I feel like we win the entire series by winning this test ... I cried for my five-wicket haul but I'm so happy now. I'm not even tired. I would have kept bowling."

West Indies had not beaten Australia in a test match since it won by 10 wickets at WACA in 1997, and Cameron Green and



Smith well negotiated the first hour after they resumed the 216-run chase at 60-2 and raised Australia hopes of finishing the home test summer 5-0 after it routed Pakistan 3-0 and also won the first test against the West Indies in dominant style.

But Joseph returned with a stunning spell of fast bowling to breathe life when he grabbed 660 off an unchanged ten overs spell before the first session ended that left Australia still needing 29.

Joseph reached speeds of close to 150 kph (93 mph) and tore

through the Australian middle order in a breathtaking spell. He bowled Green (42) to break a 71-run stand before blasting through Head's defence with a superb yorker with his next ball while bowling the lefthander from around the wicket.

It was the second time in the match that Head was dismissed first ball.

Mitch Marsh (10) and Alex Carey (two) both came and went quickly as Australia wobbled and belief grew for West Indies of achieving a stunning upset.

Starc made a quickfire 21 before he became Joseph's fifth wicket when he was caught by Kevin Sinclair at cover. Cummins, who scored a career-high 64 not out in the first innings, could only manage two before he edged a ball through to Joshua da Silva with Australia still requiring 41

runs to win.

Smith and Lyon brought down the target to 29, but Alzarri Joseph had Lyon caught behind soon after the break, one ball after he couldn't grab a tough return catch.

Smith then played a superb lapshot for a six off Alzarri Joseph over fine leg and brought the target down to single digits.

But Shamar Joseph would have the final say as he uprooted Hazlewood's off stump with another pacey delivery to seal West Indies' famous win amid wild celebrations by the tourists.

"Obvious disappointment after a loss but that was a fantastic test match and a fantastic series," Cummins said. "I thought in particular, Shamar, the way he bowled today, he was right up for it and unfortunately we weren't good

"I thought West Indies were fantastic. They outplayed us this week. Sometimes you always learn the lessons the hard way.

West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite said his team-mates got pumped up by former Australian cricketer Rodney Hogg's criticism, heading into the Gabba test.

"I must say we had two words that inspired us in this test match," Brathwaite said. "Mr. Rodney Hogg said that we were pathetic and hopeless'. That that was our inspiration. We wanted to show the world we're not pathetic. And I must ask him, are these muscles big enough for him?'

Brathwaite praised Joseph's brilliant fast bowling and said he came to know about Joseph's availability only an hour before fourth day's play.

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